

Summary of the 2021 Meeting of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development: 6-15 July 2021

“Let us renew our determination to build a strong, sustainable and inclusive recovery from the pandemic, and to take decisive action together to defeat the climate crisis and keep the promise of the 2030 Agenda,” said UN Secretary-General António Guterres to the 2021 gathering of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). This theme echoed through the virtual panel discussions and presentations throughout the eight-day meeting. The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the worst global recession since 1930, caused immense suffering, and set back efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Participants highlighted increased poverty rates and hunger, decreased number of children in school, job losses, increased debt burdens, growing inequalities, along with increased human rights violations—all linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet at the same time, many said the solutions exist to recover and build back better. Panelists focused on the importance of social protection systems, sustainable agriculture, digitization, creating new debt relief and financing architecture, and stronger partnerships between civil society, the private sector, governments and the international community, among others, as the way to get back on track.

The Forum focused on the theme of “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.” To that end, the Forum reviewed progress on the following SDGs:

- SDG 1: No poverty
- SDG 2: Zero hunger
- SDG 3: Good health and well-being
- SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth
- SDG 10: Reduced inequalities
- SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production
- SDG 13: Climate action
- SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions
- SDG 17: Partnerships

In this Issue

A Brief History of the HLPF	2
2021 HLPF Report	3
The SDGs in a time of crisis	3
Ensuring that no one is left behind	3
Building resilience against future shocks	4
SDGs in focus: How do we get on track to end poverty and hunger, and transform towards inclusive and sustainable economies?	4
Looking at the 2020 targets	4
SDGs in focus: How do we revamp and transform consumption and production and address and mitigate climate change?	4
SDGs in focus: How do we get on track for building more peaceful, equal, and inclusive societies?	5
Going local	5
Restoring the conditions for SDG progress in African countries, Least Developed Countries and Landlocked Developing Countries	5
Coming together to help small island developing states to get on a path to realize the SDGs	5
Mobilizing science, technology and innovation and strengthening the science-policy-society interface	5
Vision and priorities of civil society, the private sector and other Major Groups and Stakeholders	6
Investing in the SDGs	6
Opening of the High-level Segment	6
Voluntary National Reviews	7
Closing of the HLPF	12
Ministerial Declaration	14
A Brief Analysis of the 2021 HLPF	15
Upcoming Meetings	17
Glossary	18

The Forum also considered the integrated and interlinked nature of the SDGs and reviewed the SDG targets that matured in 2020, and discussed whether to update these targets. Specific focus was given to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SDGs in least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), small island developing states (SIDS) and African countries, as well as the special challenges faced by middle-income countries, and the need for reform of the international financial system and the debt relief architecture.

During the second week of the meeting, 42 countries presented Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of their efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda, including 10 first timers, 24 second timers, and 10 third timers.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Forum took up the draft Ministerial Declaration in a formal session. Following recorded votes on three amendments to paragraphs on climate change, gender, and biodiversity submitted by the Russian Federation, and a proposal by Israel to delete a paragraph on the realization of the right to self-determination of peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation, the declaration was adopted without amendment and by acclamation. The declaration emphasizes the need for a resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that can, over the long term, reinforce, stimulate, and advance the SDGs.

The 2021 HLPF included more than 276 side events, ten special events and high-level launches of reports, 17 VNR labs, and 12 virtual exhibitions. Nine Heads of State and Government, more than 100 Deputy Prime Ministers, Ministers and Vice-Ministers, and over 190 other speakers participated in town hall meetings, panels and fireside chats. The 2021 HLPF convened in a hybrid format (both virtual and at UN Headquarters) from 6-15 July 2021.

A Brief History of the HLPF

The HLPF was established in July 2013 by UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution [67/290](#) as the main forum for sustainable development issues within the UN. The HLPF is one of the main outcomes of the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and replaced the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which was established at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit). The UNGA resolution calls on the HLPF to meet under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) every year, and under the auspices of the UNGA every four years, to:

- provide political leadership, guidance, and recommendations for sustainable development;
- follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments;
- enhance the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development; and
- have a focused, dynamic, and action-oriented agenda, ensuring the appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges.

In September 2015, the UN Sustainable Development Summit adopted “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” a package that includes the 17 SDGs, 169 targets, and a framework for follow-up and review of implementation. The 2030 Agenda called on the HLPF to take a central role in the follow-up and review process at the global level, and to carry out voluntary, state-led national reviews (VNRs).

Key Turning Points

Early Sessions of the HLPF: The one-day inaugural session of the HLPF, on 24 September 2013, was held under the auspices of the UNGA and followed the closing session of the CSD. Heads of State and Government articulated a number of concrete proposals on the role of the HLPF, saying it should include stakeholders, emphasize accountability, review the post-2015 development agenda and the implementation of the SDGs, and examine issues from scientific and local perspectives. There was general agreement on the need for a genuine balance between the three dimensions of sustainable development, and for the HLPF to seek to integrate these dimensions throughout the UN system.

The 2014 and 2015 sessions focused on overcoming gaps in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the potential role of the post-2015 HLPF in implementation and review, respectively.

2016 HLPF Session: The fourth session of the HLPF (11-20 July 2016) was the first to take place after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. It was also the first session that included VNRs, and 22 countries shared their experiences with the 2030 Agenda. This session was also the first where elements of the Ministerial Declaration were put to a vote. A controversial paragraph relating to the Paris Agreement on climate change remained intact following the vote.

2017 HLPF Session: In-depth reviews of the SDGs were initiated at this session (10-19 July 2017), focusing on six goals: SDG 1 (no poverty); SDG 2 (zero hunger); SDG 3 (good health and well-being); SDG 5 (gender equality); SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure); and SDG 14 (life below water). SDG 17 (partnerships) was also reviewed and would be reviewed annually during this first cycle. Forty-three countries presented VNRs. Once again, two elements of the Ministerial Declaration—relating to occupied territories and the multilateral trade system—were put to a vote. While the Declaration was adopted with both paragraphs receiving overwhelming support, a number of countries abstained from voting, protesting that the voting process itself diluted a strong political signal from the HLPF.

2018 HLPF Session: This session (9-18 July 2018) focused on the theme of “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies.” Five goals were reviewed in addition to SDG 17: SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation); SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy); SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities); SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production); and SDG 15 (life on land). Forty-six countries presented VNRs. A Ministerial Declaration was adopted, following a vote on the text as a whole, and specifically on means of implementation and global partnerships, peace and security, and gender equality.

2019 HLPF Session: The 2019 session (9-19 July 2019) completed the first four-year cycle of the HLPF. The key message from the meeting was that the global response to implementing the SDGs had not been ambitious enough, and renewed commitment and accelerated action was needed to deliver the SDGs in time. The session focused on the theme of “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.” Five SDGs were reviewed in addition to SDG 17: SDG 4 (quality education); SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth); SDG 10 (reduced inequalities); SDG 13 (climate action); and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions). VNRs

were presented by 47 countries during the Ministerial Segment, with seven countries presenting for the second time.

SDG Summit: The SDG Summit (24-25 September 2019) was the first HLPF session to convene under the auspices of the UNGA since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015. Heads of State and Government reviewed progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs, with just over a decade left to the target date of 2030. The Summit featured six “leaders dialogues” on: megatrends impacting the achievement of the SDGs; accelerating the achievement of the SDGs: critical entry points; measures to leverage progress across the SDGs; localizing the SDGs; partnerships for sustainable development; and the 2020-2030 vision. A political declaration was adopted during the opening segment, on “Gearing up for a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development: Political declaration of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit.”

2020 HLPF Session: This meeting was originally intended to initiate a new four-year cycle to review SDG implementation and assess progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. Instead, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was held virtually, and the agenda focused on the impact of the pandemic and how to “build back better.” Forty-seven countries presented VNRs, with 26 presenting for the first time. The meeting ended without the adoption of a ministerial declaration, due to lack of consensus and lack of voting procedures during a virtual meeting.

2021 HLPF Report

ECOSOC President Munir Akram (Pakistan) opened the 2021 session of the HLPF on Tuesday, 6 July. He referenced the devastating global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially on the poorest people and countries. He emphasized using the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development as guides to deal with current challenges. As Chair of the HLPF, which was meeting under the auspices of ECOSOC, Akram encouraged participants to use the Forum as a platform to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to the 2030 Agenda.

Macky Sall, President of Senegal, called for equal access to vaccines and additional financing for low-income countries, especially in Africa. He noted the need to overhaul the global economic system, including reform of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) rules on credit export conditions, and clamping down on illicit financial flows and tax evasion. He welcomed the US proposal for a global minimum corporate tax rate.

Tedros Adhanom, Director-General, World Health Organization (WHO), described how the COVID-19 response has become an issue of the “haves versus have-nots.” He encouraged continued commitments through the COVAX initiative to ensure developing countries have access to more vaccines, data, information, resources, technology, and health tools so that every nation can keep its people safe. He said the WHO urges Member States to focus on three key priorities: sharing vaccines; providing financing to ensure countries have the health tools to combat the virus; and sharing mRNA technologies as well as scientific and technological capacities and capabilities.

Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director, International Monetary Fund (IMF), drew attention to the fact that for the first time in 20 years, the fight against poverty is falling behind. She encouraged countries to mobilize additional resources and finance, focusing on the private sector to spur growth.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General, World Trade Organization (WTO), stressed that the WTO has played a crucial role during the pandemic by urging Member States to exercise restraint on trade restrictions. She called on Member States to free up vaccine supply chains by lowering restrictions, work with developing countries to identify supply bottlenecks, and share intellectual property, technology, and knowledge on vaccine production.

Michael Kremer, University of Chicago, Development Innovation Lab, Becker Friedman Institute for Economics and Nobel Laureate 2019, spoke about the role of innovation in promoting sustainable development. He highlighted the position of governments and institutions in providing both physical and policy innovations that address the issues of the global pandemic.

The SDGs in a time of crisis: A sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 as an opportunity to realize the SDGs

In this session on 6 July, Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, presented the [Secretary-General's report](#) on progress towards the SDGs and measures to realize the SDGs during the COVID-19 pandemic, describing how the pandemic has undermined decades of development efforts.

Achim Steiner, Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), moderated the session. The panelists focused on how to recover from the pandemic and realize the SDGs, especially in education, including investing in girls' education, encouraging COVID-19 vaccinations to help children return to school, ensuring internet connectivity in schools, and protecting children from abuse. Other comments focused on targeted subsidies for small and medium-sized enterprises, universal health policies, data innovation, public-private partnerships, debt relief, and conditional cash transfers (CCTs). There were also calls to prioritize inclusion and equity in the care-giving sector (care economy), which represents 9% of global gross domestic production (GDP).

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/6July2021

Ensuring that no one is left behind

Jane Barratt, Secretary General, International Federation on Ageing, moderated the session on 6 July, saying millions of the most vulnerable have been left behind.

The panelists and discussants recommended a human rights-based approach to pandemic recovery, increased social spending, and improved internet access, which one panelist called “a lifeline” during the pandemic and is a critical enabler of human development. The panel also addressed challenges that LDCs face during the pandemic, including reductions in trade and tourism, and the groups that were most affected by the pandemic—“the hard to reach, missing middle”—especially in the Global South. There was also a call for rapid financial support for developing countries, including unconditional grants to meet healthcare needs and create safety nets, policies to address youth employment and mental health, integrated

data for development, and social protection systems, especially for immigrants, who are vulnerable to the pandemic but also on the front lines of the response in healthcare, homecare, and agriculture.

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/6July2021

Building resilience against future shocks through structural changes and investment in sustainable infrastructure

On 6 July, Moderator Atif Kubursi, McMaster University, Canada, opened the panel, noting how the digital and infrastructural divides have hampered our collective security.

The panelists stressed the multiple disadvantages that developing countries face due to the impacts of climate change and the pandemic. To help mitigate this growing divide, recommendations included to: harness technology to better anticipate future shocks and disasters; provide financing to transform climate change as a catalyst for economic growth; secure accessibility to online technology to ensure equitable food distribution; and effectively connect volunteers, service providers, and policy makers to strengthen public and social services.

In the discussion, participants noted the importance of addressing inequalities, investing in infrastructure to combat social inequalities, internet connectivity, risk management, and promoting business innovation.

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/6July2021

SDGs in focus: How do we get on track to end poverty and hunger, and transform towards inclusive and sustainable economies?

In her keynote address on Wednesday, 7 July, Sania Nishtar, Federal Minister and Special Assistant on Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, discussed the disproportionate socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on the poor.

Maria-Francesca Spatolisano, UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), presented the outcomes of an open poll on good practices in SDG implementation. She highlighted some of the 740 submissions: the European Union (EU) External Investment Plan, Partnership for Action on Green Economy, Yucatan Solidario, the SINERGI Project, the Planet+ Program for Carbon Neutrality by 2022, and Impact Investing by Merck pharmaceutical.

Yongyi Min, UNDESA, presented elements of the Secretary-General's report on progress toward SDGs 1, 2, and 8. She said the global poverty rate is projected to be 7% by 2030, missing the SDG target of 3%, and that between 83-132 million additional people experienced hunger in 2020, while 255 million people lost full time jobs, four times the number lost during the 2007-2009 financial crisis. She added that youth and women were especially hard hit by the pandemic.

Gerda Verburg, Coordinator, Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, moderated. In the first panel, discussion centered on the role of partnerships, financial assistance to developing countries and innovative finance, and COVID-19 vaccine rollout and vaccine equity in achieving the SDGs. Panelists highlighted the need for: universal social protection; policy coherence across health, social and economic dimensions; formalization of informal workers and gender equity in employment; school food programmes to improve nutrition; and CCTs and private sector financing.

The second panel focused on the voices of small producers, who produce 30-70% of global food. Panel discussions emphasized: safety nets for farmers; interlinkages between climate and nutrition; uniting public and private investment and financing for agriculture, and combining incentives and policies; and nature-based solutions to address hunger and malnutrition. Panelists and discussants stressed how the pandemic exacerbated poverty and hunger for the most vulnerable and marginalized.

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/7July2021

Looking at the 2020 targets: Implementation and review

Moderating this session on 7 July, Manish Bapna, World Resources Institute, asked participants to reflect on whether the 21 targets that matured in 2020 should be updated to mirror the corresponding targets that are being developed in relevant intergovernmental processes.

Some panelists expressed interest in updating the 2020 targets. Others called for continued review of the 2020 targets but warned against re-opening the 2030 Agenda, reminding participants about the delicate balance achieved during the negotiations and noting this could risk dismantling the entire Agenda. Panelists noted, for example, lessons learned from the challenges in achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets that are being used to create the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, and that not achieving some targets does not diminish overall efforts, since their achievement is "perpetual work." Participants also stressed the role of regional cooperation on issues such as sustainable forest management, road safety, infrastructure, and youth development, and highlighted the need for increased monitoring, political ambition, and financing, such as payments for ecosystem services to ensure a nature-positive and carbon-neutral world, as well as evidence-based decision-making and the importance of the civil society voice.

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/7July2021

SDGs in focus: How do we revamp and transform consumption and production and address and mitigate climate change?

On 7 July, Heather Page, UNDESA, presented the elements from the Secretary-General's report on progress towards SDGs 12, 13, and 17. She highlighted: one million plastic drinking bottles are purchased every minute; five trillion single-use plastic bags are thrown away each year; the global material footprint increased by 70% between 2000 and 2017; greenhouse gas concentrations reached record highs in 2020; and foreign direct investment (FDI) dropped by up to 40%, and is below USD 1 trillion for the first time since 2005.

Jennifer Morris, CEO, The Nature Conservancy, moderated the panels. In the first panel, speakers discussed a range of issues, including: low carbon and nature positive funding; emissions from agriculture and forestry and transition from fossil fuels; food sovereignty; small-farmer and youth empowerment; and the importance of partnerships.

In the second panel, conversation focused on how to transform economic and social consumption and production to be more sustainable and promote a circular economy.

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/7July2021

SDGs in focus: How do we get on track for building more peaceful, equal, and inclusive societies?

On 8 July, Haoyi Chen, UNDESA, presented elements of the Secretary-General's report on progress towards the SDGs, including disruption of health services and upward trends for displaced people, child labor, and trafficking victims.

Jan Beagle, Director-General, International Development Law Organization, moderated the session, noting the COVID-19 response and the SDGs are essentially the same agenda. Panelists drew attention to the "pharmaceutical monopoly" that developing countries must contend with not just in accessing the COVID-19 vaccine, but in fighting other ongoing pandemics such as HIV, tuberculosis, malaria and Ebola. They also expressed support for universal healthcare and social protection to help elevate marginalized groups. Panelists noted ongoing vicious cycles of corruption aided by offshore tax havens have contributed to social and economic inequalities. They encouraged stable audit systems that are transparent and regain the trust of citizens. A number of speakers also stressed the interconnectedness of current crises and encouraged the One Health approach supported by international cooperation and allocation for more health workers and services.

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/8July2021

Going local: How can we support local authorities in implementing the SDGs and how can we best build on voluntary local reviews?

On 8 July, Moderator Tony Pipa, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution, highlighted the value of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) in translating concrete community actions and solutions. Panelists from local authorities shared their experiences with VLRs, noting they are useful because they are prepared by local communities on their own terms. They stressed that the SDGs can only be achieved if local authorities take the lead, since one-third of the targets must be achieved at the local level. It was reported that the VLR Declaration, which formally commits local and regional governments to reporting on the SDGs, now has 215 signatories from around the world. The discussion highlighted the need to empower and support local governments, the importance of data to support local communities, and the need for greater awareness of the SDGs by local governments.

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/8July2021

Restoring the conditions for SDG progress in African countries, Least Developed Countries and Landlocked Developing Countries

On 8 July, Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), on behalf of the five UN regional commissions, said COVID-19 calls for: scaling up recovery programmes to put people and planet first; boosting export diversification and harnessing new and emerging technologies; and the international community to complement national COVID-19 recovery efforts.

Moderator Courtenay Rattray, UN High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, called for faster access to vaccines, restoring living conditions, and getting back on track to achieve the SDGs.

Panelists noted the need to restore funding for SDG implementation—not just more finance, but better and more effective finance. They noted the lack of energy access in LDCs and LLDCs impacts progress on other SDGs, and called for targeted training and education for women and youth, especially in clean energy jobs and a just energy transition, and to meet the SDGs and the goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change. Noting LLDCs and LDCs' economies declined in 2020, they called for a focus on ending extreme poverty, better stimulus plans, a shift to a more knowledge-intensive and industrialized economy, more comprehensive debt relief architecture, strengthening global and multi-stakeholder partnerships, and South-South and triangular cooperation.

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/8July2021

Coming together to help small island developing states to get on a path to realize the SDGs

On 9 July, Mafalda Duarte, CEO, Climate Investment Funds, said the middle-income status of many SIDS does not adequately reflect their true situation. In terms of the pandemic, SIDS bear the brunt of a 70% decline in international travel, and report a 7% decline in GDP.

The focus of the panel, moderated by E.P. Chet Greene, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Immigration and International Trade, Antigua and Barbuda, was the importance of developing a multidimensional vulnerability index (MVI) for SIDS. The speakers argued that GDP does not take into consideration the multiple vulnerabilities facing SIDS, including climate change, tropical cyclones, and reliance on tourism and imports. Their categorization as middle-income countries prevents SIDS from receiving much needed concessional aid, which is negatively affecting pandemic recovery. As one speaker noted, "When a hurricane or cyclone comes it doesn't ask what your GDP is."

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/9July2021

Mobilizing science, technology and innovation and strengthening the science-policy-society interface

Andrejs Pildegovičs, Co-Chair of the 2021 Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Forum (Latvia), moderated this session on 9 July. Panelists highlighted the indispensable role that STI plays in the sustainable development agenda. It was noted that half of the world's population remains disconnected from digital technologies at an estimated cost of USD 450 billion, which remains unmet due to lack of funding. Panelists added that the digital divide is further deepened at the intersection of technology and gender, noting that women and girls still disproportionately lack access to STI knowledge and prowess needed to be competitive in the formal economy. Panelists shared how their respective countries and organizations are creating initiatives and programmes to connect more vulnerable groups to digital platforms. They further explained how technologies could be harnessed to directly address global

challenges such as food security through advanced and greener agricultural methods, predicting future disasters, and ensuring more equitable supply chains.

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/9July2021

Vision and priorities of civil society, the private sector and other Major Groups and Stakeholders: Realizing the SDGs during the COVID-19 recovery

In this panel on 9 July, moderated by Mabel Bianco, Co-Chair, HLPF Major Groups and other Stakeholders Coordination Mechanism, participants emphasized that Major Groups and other Stakeholders are critical actors in the implementation of the SDGs by holding governments accountable and ensuring no one is left behind. They agreed that COVID-19 has widened inequalities, particularly for people who are vulnerable and face discrimination based on race, gender, and homophobia, and called for laws and policies to enable access to education, healthcare, and employment for all without barriers. Some raised alarm that many countries are using the pandemic as an excuse to increase authoritarianism and human rights abuses and recommended ensuring a human rights perspective in the implementation of SDGs, stressing the importance of consulting and involving women, persons with disabilities and the voices of older people in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/9July2021

Investing in the SDGs

On Monday, 12 July, participants convened to hear presentations on reshaping the financial sector, in a panel moderated by Homi Kharas, Senior Fellow and Deputy Director for the Global Economy and Development Program, Brookings Institution. As many noted, the issue of funding, already a prominent pre-pandemic barrier to equal progress and overall achievement of the SDGs, became a significantly greater obstacle during the pandemic. The summary of financial gaps described by panelists was dire, urgent and pervasive. Six countries had defaulted on debt in 2020, there was an 11% GDP increase in the debt burden in emerging markets and a default rate on emerging markets reaching 19% of sovereign debt, leading to a USD 15 trillion increase in global debt since 2019. This led to 36 countries with downgraded credit ratings; the IMF forecasting that 47 countries would have per capita GDP below their 2019 levels within five years; 2020 FDI falling 37% in Latin America and 4% in Asia; and negative trends in more than 30 emerging markets. There was broad agreement among participants on the need for comprehensive reform of the international financial and debt architecture. Many also stressed the need to shift away from GDP per capita and national income metrics and incorporate vulnerability measures.

To further address financial challenges, panelists recommended a number of solutions. The panel considered, among other options: scaled-up debt relief using new instruments; boosting liquidity and access to concessional finance; accompanying special drawing rights with liquidity distribution; using social, green and sustainability bonds; and scaling up private sector funding. Panelists also supported: greater transparency in investments and refining methodology for defining, “scoring,” and measuring the impact

of sustainable development projects; involving diverse debtors and creditors; enhancing digital gender equity; and addressing tax evasion by multinational corporations.

On financial support to developing countries, they encouraged: directing capital to emerging economies and developing markets; channeling more private sector resources to countries with underinvestment; debt-for-nature swaps; respecting and enhancing official development assistance (ODA) commitments; and encouraging private creditors to participate in the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI).

Member States outlined a number of innovations they have already implemented, including green and sovereign blue bonds, and a framework that maps ODA to the SDGs.

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/12July2021

Opening of the High-level Segment of ECOSOC/Ministerial Segment of HLPF

ECOSOC President Akram opened the High-level Segment on Tuesday, 13 July, noting the ministerial segment is an opportunity to demonstrate international solidarity and cooperation, and lay the foundation for a global recovery that builds back better. He called for universal vaccination and a comprehensive programme of social protection, stating “no one will be safe until everyone is safe.”

UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for decisive action in four areas:

- universal access to COVID-19 vaccines, testing, and support;
- urgent, ambitious climate action, including commitments to net-zero carbon emissions by mid-century, accelerating transition from fossil fuels, and adequate finance;
- investing in more equal and inclusive societies, including gender equality, the care economy, jobs, and training for young people, and improved labor conditions and rights in the informal sector; and
- financing for development, including a more equitable debt architecture.

UNGA President Volkan Bozkir emphasized that the pandemic is both a tragedy and an opportunity. He called for: reforming the global financing architecture; rapidly expanding digitization, noting the digital divide is becoming “the new face of inequality”; reducing gender inequality; and promoting a green recovery that reconciles humanity’s relationship with the natural world.

Imran Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan, discussed the triple environmental challenge the world faces as it seeks to address climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. He noted inequalities within and among nations, and shared four priorities for achieving the SDGs and pandemic recovery: universal and affordable access to vaccines; adequate finance; social protection strategies; and reforms to the international financial and trade architecture.

Joko Widodo, President of Indonesia, called for: a quick recovery through fair and equitable vaccine access, stressing the need for action and asserting “vaccines as a global public good cannot remain a slogan”; and focusing on assistance to vulnerable groups, support to developing countries, and strengthened global partnerships and trust.

Marta Lucía Ramírez Blanco, Vice President of Colombia, highlighted Colombia's experience with the impacts of the crisis, particularly with regard to poverty eradication, inequality, and unemployment, and work on innovative green and sustainable large-scale solutions. She drew attention to the Leticia Pact, the new environmental charter of the Andean Community, and Colombia's revised nationally determined contribution (NDC).

Noting his country is ranked in the top 10 for SDG progress, Sebastian Kurz, Chancellor of Austria, outlined lessons learned from Austria's COVID-19 response. He reported that e-screening tests are used in schools 2-3 times per week and that Austria, with 2 million tests per week for a population of 9 million, had the highest rate of testing globally. He also said government support for small and medium-sized enterprises saved over 1 million jobs, and investment in digitization included EUR 1.4 billion to companies, public administration, and schools for broadband coverage by 2030.

Steve Lee, Major Group for Children and Youth, highlighted key outcomes of the ECOSOC Youth Forum 2021, which called on Member States to: prioritize universal affordable access to mental health services for youth; provide universal and affordable internet access; stop investment in coal, oil and gas; scale up NDCs; guarantee inclusion of youth with disabilities; and take an intersectional approach to capturing disaggregated data of young people. He stressed the importance of sharing decision-making power with youth and including children on UN delegations and in the VNR process.

Melati Wijsen, Co-Founder of Bye Bye Plastic Bags and Youthtopia, underscored: making youth equal partners in SDG implementation; investing in education; the importance of long-term partnerships; and the responsibility, urgency, and need among young people to "rise and rally." She described her work to successfully champion a ban on plastic bags in Bali, Indonesia, and asserted that this youth-led initiative now exists in over 30 countries and drove the establishment of Youthtopia, which provides youth with changemaker skills.

Keynote Address: In his keynote address on 13 July, Sveinung Rotevatn, President of the fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA 5) and Minister of Climate and Environment, Norway, highlighted the need for more holistic approaches to respond to the negative impacts of environmental and economic crises, which are disproportionately felt by marginalized groups.

To sufficiently address the triple environmental crises, he suggested:

- scaling up global climate action to deliver on the Paris Agreement commitments;
- establishing economic and socially sustainable pathways to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and enhance ecosystem integrity;
- enhancing capacity to achieve sound management of chemicals and waste;
- promoting effective global governance;
- mobilizing adequate, predictable, and sustainable resources from all sources;
- adopting an ambitious and realistic post-2020 global biodiversity framework; and
- developing measures that foster mainstreaming of environmental sustainability across economic sectors.

He noted that 2022 marks the 50th anniversary of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and invited Member States and stakeholders to take part in a special celebratory UNEA session.

Messages from the Regions: This session on Wednesday, 14 July, was moderated by Rola Dashti, Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). After a short video highlighting key regional challenges, the ministers who chaired the 2021 Regional Forums on Sustainable Development reported on the recommendations from their meetings, which included the need for investment in research and innovation, greater resource mobilization, increasing climate ambition and moving to carbon neutrality, accelerated digitization, universal healthcare, promoting a sustainable post-pandemic recovery, strengthening regional collaboration, and increasing the size of the civic space to include all stakeholders.

The Executive Secretaries of the five UN Regional Commissions then presented their messages, which highlighted the need for equitable vaccine access, improved financing, addressing debt, improving social protection programmes, digitization, access to better data, and the green economy.

In the interactive dialogue "Voices from the Regions," panelists from the private sector and civil society described how they have been responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. They called for more public-private cooperation and partnerships, resource mobilization for renewable energy, and harnessing grassroots movements as an example of how dialogue can lead to progressive policymaking.

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/14July2021

Voluntary National Reviews

UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed opened the VNR presentations. She said VNRs have become a centerpiece of the HLPF, noting that 177 countries have presented at least one VNR, reflecting commitment to the 2030 Agenda. She hoped this year's VNRs would allow the HLPF to discuss recovery plans and strategies to achieve the SDGs by 2030. She highlighted how VNRs have increased transparency while strengthening institutions and ministerial cooperation, and commended the 100 UN country teams and UN economic commissions for their VNR preparation support.

Forty-two countries presented their VNRs between 12 and 15 July—eight for the first time, 24 for the second time, and 10 for the third time. Following each presentation, peer countries and stakeholders had the opportunity ask questions. The summaries of these interactive dialogues for the presentations from 12-14 July are contained in the daily reports (see links below). The interactive dialogues on 15 July are summarized here. The summaries are listed in the order presented.

Monday, 12 July: AZERBAIJAN presented its third VNR. He reported on their National Coordinating Council for Sustainable Development that consults with the scientific community, NGOs, civil society, and the private sector, saying their new socio-economic strategy 2021-2025 is being adapted to the SDGs. He noted several reforms in 2019 including doubling the minimum wage and increasing pension levels. In response to COVID-19, he cited priorities including vaccination, expanding unemployment benefits, improving healthcare systems, and restoring the economy. He

outlined how the end of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is providing greater peace and stability, which are prerequisites for sustainable development.

The CZECH REPUBLIC presented its second VNR, highlighting climate change and the Czech Republic's green transformation to protect the environment and biodiversity. In this regard, he indicated that the Czech Republic aims to plant 10 million trees, reduce water use, reduce waste, and end coal production. The Czech Republic said it has increased expenditures for research and development, education, job training, and healthcare, and is addressing unemployment. However, the VNR acknowledged less progress on SDG 5 (gender equality) and a need for more systemic changes.

EGYPT presented its third VNR, emphasizing a strong participatory approach and alignment with Egypt Vision 2030. The VNR includes evidence based on 27 reports from Egyptian governorates, which depict the progress of SDG targets and indicators in all governorates to target local developmental gaps. She stressed that this VNR focused on a whole-of-society approach and shows many achievements, such as their 100 Million Healthy Lives Initiative, a decrease in poverty rates, a sovereign wealth fund, and green bonds.

QATAR presented its third VNR and highlighted its integrated programme to confront the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to minimal loss of life. He stated that achieving the 2030 Agenda requires a knowledge-based economy, support for research and development, and comprehensive statistical data. He highlighted that the Qatar National Vision 2030 includes a perspective of equality and justice and considers the needs of vulnerable groups by providing training and employment opportunities. He also mentioned the importance of hosting the first carbon-free FIFA World Cup in 2022, and the value of well-ranked educational institutions.

In its third VNR, NIGER reported a number of small, pre-pandemic improvements towards the SDGs, including decreases in overall poverty levels, chronic malnutrition, maternal and infant mortality, and HIV prevalence, along with increases in life expectancy, tuberculosis vaccination, and GDP. He said these improvements were significantly affected by the pandemic. He noted challenges to bolster promotion of good governance, rethink the education system, develop human capital especially through a focus on the education of girls and improved healthcare, improve territorial integrity, fill data gaps and integrate data, and mobilize domestic resources.

URUGUAY presented its third VNR and described the establishment of a Solidarity Fund that increased investment from 1.4 to 1.7% of GDP this year and the creation of a National Resettlement Plan. He noted 60% of the population has received their first COVID-19 vaccine dose. He emphasized development of public policies for education, social protection, and a people-centered society, including an education programme focused on the most vulnerable. He said financial sustainability is a major challenge, adding capital and environmental markets need to be aligned and business models need to be associated with the SDGs.

COLOMBIA highlighted the participatory methodology used to prepare its third VNR, which includes input from civil society, academia, and the private sector. He said the SDGs have been incorporated throughout government and more than 98% of the indicators in the 2018-2022 National Development Plan are

aligned with one SDG. Significant progress was interrupted by the pandemic, but new programmes reduced the increase in poverty by giving out tax exemptions to the poorest and providing support to household income in rural areas. He described its Multi-Stakeholder Platform and SDG Corporate Tracker.

CABO VERDE presented its second VNR. He reported that Cabo Verde has performed well in achieving gender equality through mainstreaming actions and parity in positions of power. Cabo Verde 2030 will align with Africa's Agenda 2063 and will be implemented with participation and consultation from public and private stakeholders. Cabo Verde 2030 will focus on combatting poverty, and promoting health, housing safety, economic diversification, green economy, improving electrical mobility, and transforming the agricultural sector. He added that debt forgiveness is essential to meet his country's ambitions and recover from the pandemic.

GUATEMALA presented its third VNR, noting it will allocate 7% of its national budget to the SDGs and standardize agricultural practices to boost food productivity. Guatemala set a goal to establish four hospitals and surpassed this with six hospitals built and one under construction. She said employment remains a priority, and that the IMF projects, despite the pandemic, 4.5% growth in 2021. Since 2020, she said Guatemala has implemented more than 200 actions for the national SDG implementation strategy.

MEXICO presented its third VNR, explaining it had strengthened its institutional structure to ensure coordination at the highest decision-making level and improve the mechanism for participation at all levels. At the same time, she said both a national strategy and framework of indicators and a national development plan exist to enhance alignment with the 2030 Agenda. She noted the issuance of a sovereign bond aligned with the SDGs and other thematic bonds for the productive inclusion of women.

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/12July2021

Tuesday, 13 July: ANGOLA presented its first VNR, which highlights the impact of recent pandemics (SARS and COVID-19), but maintained these crises will not hinder national reforms to advance the country's economic and social ambitions. To this end, she noted Angola created an SDG Platform in 2020 to track implementation. She described policies and programmes to generate revenue, diversify exports, and enforce import substitution, noting 60,000 people have been reached through 788 projects. She also recognized the need to establish more schools to increase the number of children completing primary education. Given that eight in ten people are engaged in informal employment, she said that with support from the EU and UNDP, Angola is developing a programme to bring more people into the formal economy.

In its first VNR, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA called for replacing GDP per capita criteria for concessional funding with a vulnerability index. Despite challenges, he highlighted many successes in SDG implementation, including: establishment of the Five Islands campus of the University of the West Indies; social protection initiatives; construction of affordable housing; investment in health infrastructure; support for private sector development and innovation; establishment of a science and innovation park; renewable energy projects; and appointment of the first Minister of the Blue Economy.

In its first VNR, CUBA highlighted its effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to one of the lowest mortality rates in Latin America. He noted Cuba's production of vaccines and medication, and the deployment of 57 medical brigades in 40 countries, despite challenges posed by the United States' economic blockade. He said the path to SDG achievement is aligned with the National Economic and Social Development Plan, which was developed through a participatory approach and includes: the empowerment of women; electrification; natural disaster preparedness; innovation in health; and social protection, among others. He called for renewed and bolstered multilateralism based on principles of solidarity.

BOLIVIA presented its first VNR, lamenting its 8.8% drop in GDP in 2020 and other regressions due to the pandemic. She highlighted the new socio-economic development plan guided by the SDGs, and efforts to reduce extreme poverty, such as through increases in the minimum wage. She noted the 2019 implementation of universal health coverage, including a prenatal subsidy, and establishment of a normative framework to reduce violence against women, ensure their political rights, and promote women's land ownership. She highlighted declines in illegal deforestation from 62 to 43% and an increase in reforestation.

SAN MARINO noted that preparations for its first VNR began in 2017 in consultation with local NGOs and other stakeholders. He said although San Marino does not have extreme forms of poverty, the pandemic has led to an increase in relative poverty, resulting in the need for more inclusive social welfare assistance programmes. San Marino commits to reduce the student-teacher ratio to guarantee quality education, more job placement assistance, and increased financial resources to support victims of violence. San Marino also seeks to enhance integration between hospitals and health services, diversify its economy, promote sustainable agriculture practices, and protect the environment.

The DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA (DPRK) presented its first VNR, noting it was prepared in consultation with all ministries, agencies, and organizations. He said DPRK provides free medical care and education, and progress has been made in supporting the economy and ensuring the cultural life of its people. He stressed that disaster risk reduction is one of the top national priorities, due to climate change and natural disasters. Moving forward, he said SDG implementation will: optimize use of DPRK's own resources, technology, and self-reliance; strengthen data collection; and enhance partnerships with other countries and international organizations.

The MARSHALL ISLANDS presented its first VNR, which emphasizes the effect climate change has on the islands and its people, and is aligned with the country's National Strategic Plan. He highlighted the health strategy, which is based on their cultural value of "Kumiti Ejmour," meaning "health is a shared responsibility," as well as economic issues, including the blue economy, sustainable fisheries, trade, and private sector inclusion, to create a pathway to self-sufficiency. He addressed advancements in good governance and human rights, particularly in achieving gender equality.

In presenting its first VNR, NICARAGUA discussed challenges, including political unrest, recent Category 4 and 5 hurricanes, and COVID-19, leading its GDP to sink to 2010 levels. He said USD 2 billion per year in ODA is needed to tackle the environmental crisis. He emphasized the "unjust and illegal unilateral and

coercive measures" from developed countries that restrict access to financial resources, inhibit achievement of the SDGs, and undermine sovereignty. Despite these challenges, he noted national achievements include: free public education for 1.8 million students and feeding programmes for all primary schoolers; universal health coverage and the construction of the largest hospital network in Central America; increased safe drinking water, sewage systems, electricity, and quality roads; a food voucher programme; and a roadmap to achieve 72% vaccination by 2022.

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/13July2021

Wednesday, 14 July: CHINA presented its second VNR, noting: China was the only major economy registering positive growth during the pandemic; its COVID-19 response effectively treated all people, young and old; and it donated 290 billion masks, 4.9 billion testing kits, and over 500 million vaccines to over 100 countries. He emphasized China's elimination of absolute poverty, creation of 60 million new urban jobs in the last five years, and increased life expectancy. He also noted that giant pandas are no longer endangered. He said China's carbon intensity dropped 48.4% from 2005 levels. He added China is working to bridge the Belt and Road Initiative with the 2030 Agenda.

AFGHANISTAN presented its second VNR, noting its work to integrate the 2030 Agenda into a national peace and development framework. He outlined the establishment of an SDG Executive Committee and four Technical Committees and creation of a national indicator framework using 28 government entities as custodians. He described: improvement on hunger; expansion of social protection to all citizens; investments in climate change resilience and renewable energy; and better provision of education. He emphasized the challenges of its national conflict, and noted the way forward requires peace building, state building, market building, and international financial assistance.

DENMARK's second VNR highlighted initiatives on green investment, sustainable value chains, and labor rights, among others. He stressed that all new legislation will be screened for coherence with the SDGs. He highlighted how different stakeholder groups contributed chapters to the VNR and reported Denmark's challenges include responsible consumption and production and the need for a stronger focus on the most marginalized groups.

THAILAND presented its second VNR, noting that although the pandemic has exacerbated inequalities, the prospects of the 4th Industrial Revolution promises opportunities to change in positive ways. Considering this, Thailand underlined its focus on a Bio-Circular-Green Economy model.

CHAD presented its second VNR, highlighting the strides it has made in reducing poverty, ensuring clean drinking water, increasing schooling, and shrinking its maternal mortality rate. He noted ongoing social challenges of female genital mutilation and forced marriage of underage girls.

NORWAY presented its second VNR, highlighting innovation in areas such as artificial intelligence, big data and 5G represent opportunities to recover from the pandemic. Norway emphasized that youth are at the heart of its strategy, and introduced the President of the Norwegian Youth Council, who drew attention to the role of youth in sustainable development decision making.

TUNISIA presented its second VNR, noting its participatory approach to the review process. He referenced the development of a multi-stakeholder national committee dedicated to the implementation of the SDGs and a draft development vision aligned with the 2030 Agenda. He drew attention to efforts to increase women's participation in policymaking, end violence against women, and achieve greater gender equality. He also listed child protection as a top priority, and further discussed initiatives to establish social protections, free medical assistance, assistance for the disabled, skills training, and a national employment strategy.

The BAHAMAS presented its second VNR, recalling the dual challenge of managing recovery from a Category 5 hurricane and the COVID-19 pandemic. He emphasized youth unemployment, skills shortages, insufficient growth of key industries, and infrastructural gaps worsened by these crises. On progress, he stated SDGs 3, 8 and 13 are priority areas, and noted the establishment of a new ministry for disaster management and a successful ban on plastic utensils, straws, and containers using an import tax.

The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC presented its second VNR, explaining the government has introduced an arsenal of public policy mechanisms targeting social protection, unemployment, cash flows, and support to small and medium-sized enterprises. It acknowledged further targeted support is needed for education at all levels, digital connectivity, and the care economy.

SIERRA LEONE presented its third VNR, describing its education programme, which provides free primary education, school meals, and textbooks. He said this has allowed the country to tackle a number of SDGs, including reducing hunger, promoting universal education and literacy, and helping alleviate costs for impoverished parents. He added the programme provides savings of USD 100 per pupil. Despite these strides, he acknowledged that other fundamental challenges remain related to infrastructure, clean water, energy, and science and technology, and added that financing is the key.

A more detailed summary is available at enb.iisd.org/sdgs/HLPF2021/daily-report/14July2021

Thursday, 15 July: Panel 1: JAPAN presented its second VNR, reaffirming its commitment to accelerate efforts to achieve the SDGs through broad collaboration with stakeholders and local governments, as well as the "SDG Future Cities," the "Public-Private Partnership Platform for Local SDGs," and the "Local SDG Finance" initiatives. He noted the percentage of local governments working on the SDGs rose from 1% in 2017 to 39.7% in 2020. Other initiatives include the "SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles," through which Japan has identified eight priority issues, and the "SDGs Promotion Roundtable," which consists of representatives from various fields, civil society, and youth.

FINLAND and the MAJOR GROUP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH asked how Japan will further strengthen SDG implementation in all levels of society, including through the SDG Promotion Roundtable and in multi-stakeholder evaluation. INDIA asked how Japan will address the health and medical care challenges highlighted in its VNR.

JAPAN responded that all stakeholders are encouraged to integrate the SDGs into their policies and approaches. He added the SDG Promotion Roundtable plays a role in bringing stakeholder voices to the table and the government will strengthen this mechanism by involving youth. He described the increased

involvement of civil society in VNR preparation. He stressed the importance of universal health coverage and strengthening health systems.

In its second VNR, GERMANY called for effective progress on sustainability, including climate protection. She highlighted Germany's aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 65% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, and to reach carbon neutrality by 2045. Progress in the following six transition areas was highlighted: human well-being and capabilities and social justice; climate action and energy transition; circular economy; sustainable building and transport; sustainable agricultural and food systems; and a pollutant-free environment.

SWITZERLAND asked about public support for Germany's proposed transformation, especially with regard to ensuring protection of human rights throughout the supply chain. The MAJOR GROUP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH asked how Germany will create a just and fair labor market, especially for migrants, and how it will tackle its climate and environmental footprint. ARGENTINA asked how it has included a human rights perspective in the implementation of 2030 Agenda.

GERMANY responded that it believes postponing investment today leads to higher burdens on our children and grandchildren. She said businesses are introducing a process that respects human rights and social, labor, and environmental standards along supply and value chains. She described Germany's efforts to ensure climate targets, noting the fight for equality is important.

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC (Lao PDR) presented lessons learned in preparing its second VNR: data systems need to be harmonized, streamlined and strengthened; engagement of all stakeholders is crucial; support from development partners is fundamental; and public awareness is important for ensuring greater support and partnerships.

BANGLADESH asked how Lao PDR implements international or regional cooperation frameworks to realize the 2030 Agenda. The ASIA PACIFIC CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT MECHANISM asked how it addresses sustainable development in the context of the pandemic. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA asked about priority challenges to address to achieve the SDGs.

LAO PDR responded they see the SDGs as an overarching objective in its implementation of other action plans. He described how it is mainstreaming 80% of its 238 SDG indicators into its socio-economic development plans, and with regard to COVID-19, the focus is on achieving a 50% vaccination rate by 2022.

In its second VNR, MALAYSIA shared that the SDGs are aligned and embedded in its National Development Plan, and this VNR was prepared in consultation with local governments, parliamentarians, civil society organizations, and the private sector. Malaysia's efforts include: eradicating poverty using a transformational approach; addressing malnutrition through national policies; increasing health crisis preparedness; promoting inclusive economic growth through the expansion of micro, small and medium enterprises; reducing inequalities through income improvement and social assistance; applying a circular economy model; integrating climate change considerations into national policies, strategies and planning; and revitalizing partnerships through South-South cooperation.

JAPAN asked how Malaysia incentivizes local governments to incorporate the SDGs into local policies. The NGO MAJOR GROUP and NORWAY asked how the government will ensure

greater transparency and inclusion to improve SDG implementation. MEXICO asked about Malaysia's COVID-19 response.

MALAYSIA affirmed local government cooperation and that many SDGs are included in local development plans and Smart City Frameworks, emphasizing the importance of civil society and the private sector in its national strategy. With regard to COVID-19, Malaysia said it strengthened healthcare and protected jobs.

Panel 2: CYPRUS presented its second VNR, noting significant progress on SDG indicators related to poverty, health, and education, but remaining challenges exist on gender equality, domestic violence, and sex trafficking. He also explained that the situation with illegal migrants, despite investments, remains unsustainable and it should be regarded as a serious international issue.

ARMENIA asked about efforts and good practices to combat corruption. AUSTRIA inquired about how the development of a new economic model will boost development. BULGARIA asked about the main challenges and measures taken for migrants and refugees. The MAJOR GROUP ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH asked about inclusion of all civil society stakeholders, including migrants and vulnerable people.

CYPRUS described its progress against corruption, including the establishment of a special economic crime unit and stated it has reduced its dependency on tourism and has long-term strategies in place to mobilize green and digital investment. On migration, he said new reception centers, pilot houses, and services for unaccompanied minors are in place.

INDONESIA presented its second VNR, affirming the country's commitment to the SDGs. Indonesia stated that its poverty rate, informal sector, and unemployment rate had significantly declined pre-pandemic, but has been on the rise since 2020. Despite this, the country has managed to increase internet connectivity across its population, is ranked in the top ten most vaccinated countries in the world, and dedicated USD 3.8 billion to low-carbon activities.

IRAQ asked about pandemic recovery. The UK inquired about Indonesia's deforestation targets. FINLAND asked about the role of the omnibus law to achieve the SDGs, particularly on women's rights. The MAJOR GROUP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH asked how the government assures collaborative actions to ensure a healthy environment.

INDONESIA responded that its pandemic recovery is accompanied by a widening range of social protection policies and programmes, focusing on disease control, malnutrition, and an inclusive economic system that includes tourism, digital technology, strengthening disaster preparedness, climate resilient development, good governance, and collaboration with all stakeholders. He said its low carbon development strategies have helped to reduce deforestation rates.

IRAQ presented its second VNR, highlighting efforts of a number of cities to implement and strengthen sustainable development projects. He emphasized the role of youth as a driving force for change. Iraq's VNR, he said, contains five chapters on national progress, decentralization, selected experience of seven governorates, local competition, and not leaving anyone behind. He further underscored: international partnerships; the importance of decentralization and structuring political institutions to address equality; diverse stakeholder inclusion; and the importance of attracting foreign direct investment and engaging the private sector.

PAKISTAN asked about the added value of the new indicators compared to those used in Iraq's 2019 VNR. INDONESIA inquired about the role of youth in development strategies. The NGO MAJOR GROUP asked about drought, food insecurity, climate change, lack of rule of law, violence, and youth suicide.

IRAQ said new indicators are scheduled. He added that there are factors in place for social mobilization based on youth and women, which he hopes leads to a new contract between government and society. He said strategies are in place to address climate change and food security in alignment with international agreements.

In its second VNR, MADAGASCAR discussed its pre-pandemic achievements from 2012-2020, outlining improvements in poverty, school assistance, hunger, maternal mortality and reproductive services, economic progress, protected lands, and anti-corruption. She noted that a multidimensional poverty assessment was carried out in 2020 and an adaptation and climate resilience programme is underway. She described: plans to enhance SDG monitoring in planning and development processes to bring the SDGs closer to the people; a new national financing strategy; and strengthened coordination among stakeholders.

NORWAY asked how the pandemic has influenced SDG implementation and the role of civil society in implementing and reporting on the SDGs. MADAGASCAR responded that addressing negative impacts of the pandemic required shifting resources from other sectors, slowing down the economy, and said a major challenge is the significant urban exodus. She mentioned efforts to relaunch the economy through public investment in infrastructure.

Panel 3: BHUTAN presented its second VNR, stressing that its five-year development plan is guided by Gross National Happiness and the SDGs, and that it took a whole-of-society approach in its VNR. While its 2018 report showed all SDGs were on track, he said the pandemic provided the opportunity to rethink development and how to boost the economy, food security and sustainable agriculture, jobs, technology, disaster preparation, and environmental protection.

BANGLADESH asked Bhutan about key issues undertaken towards its graduation from LDC status. AUSTRIA asked about progress on energy efficiency and reduced consumption, climate action, resilience building, and job creation. The NGO MAJOR GROUP asked about advancing human rights. The UK asked Bhutan to elaborate on its environmental strategy to balance economic development with conservation. FINLAND asked about improvements to climate adaptation and mitigation and means to become the first zero emission country.

BHUTAN responded that it would graduate from the LDC category in 2023 based on gross national income per capita and the Human Assets Index. He explained his country's goal is to diversify its environmental and economic portfolio, including an emphasis on organic farming and certification, and to engage all stakeholders. On energy efficiency, he outlined efforts at auditing industries, providing guidelines, and swapping fossil fuel with electric vehicles.

NAMIBIA presented its second VNR stating that the SDGs are integrated into its current national development plan. He described progress on poverty and hunger, as well as advances in sustainable agriculture, early childhood education, digitization to enhance e-learning, combatting wildlife poaching, and road infrastructure. He said women now make up 49% of the Namibian parliament and that women, children, and people with disabilities have been prioritized

in the pandemic response. He stressed that challenges include low commodity prices, high unemployment, inequality, and drought.

JAPAN asked Namibia what steps it has taken to align the SDGs with international development plans. The WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS MAJOR GROUP asked how Namibia will ensure inclusion of all stakeholders and a human-centered response to the pandemic. The MAJOR GROUP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH stressed the importance of an inclusive mechanism for sustained dialogue and aligning budgetary provisions in line with the SDGs.

NAMIBIA underlined that it had “domesticated the SDGs,” and would continue to refine the alignment of its national plan with the 2030 Agenda.

SPAIN presented its second VNR, stating that it is building back better based on inclusivity. To this end, it recently passed laws to guarantee the rights of women and the LGBTI community. Spain is also focused on addressing pre-existing structural inequalities for women and girls that were exacerbated by the pandemic, saying it aims to ensure recognition of unpaid caregiving and domestic work and move away from traditional paradigms that perpetuate inequalities. Spain said it would align the country’s Green Agenda with the SDGs.

In response to questions from ARGENTINA and NEW ZEALAND, SPAIN said it has established a Parliamentary Commission for the 2030 Agenda, emphasizing its goals were to enhance competencies, coordination, and evaluation, strengthen governance and dialogue with multi-stakeholders, and strengthen data collection and analysis. Further, SPAIN stressed the importance of human rights and collaboration with local authorities, including on its VNR, and through a local government network of 32 members.

ZIMBABWE presented its third VNR, affirming its commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the African Union Agenda 2063. He said it has established an SDG government unit to ensure it is on track to achieve the SDGs. He said its sustainable development strategy is focused on improving infrastructure in areas such as energy, water and sanitation, information and communication technology, transport and housing. He also said the government seeks to establish universal healthcare and has made strides in reducing violence of all forms through public awareness campaigns.

CUBA asked Zimbabwe what measures it had taken to address the pandemic. ZIMBABWE said it allocated 9% of its GDP towards pandemic recovery for health, youth empowerment, and small business initiatives, as well as additional funds for economic stability, education, and towards addressing health infrastructure and healthcare coverage. He noted efforts to include youth participation in various platforms including a children’s parliament and children’s council.

Panel 4: PARAGUAY presented its second VNR, highlighting the multi-stakeholder approach taken to prepare its VNR, which included children, civil society and local authorities in its consultations. Paraguay described its SDG Commission and how it has incorporated SDGs into its current political framework, including the National Development Plan, the social protection system and their general budget. She highlighted their focus on strengthening economic, social, and environmental resilience, and the work of the National Statistics Institute in supporting evidence-based policy.

In the discussion, CHILE asked Paraguay what mechanisms it put in place to ensure all sectors of society contributed to its second VNR. MEXICO was interested in more details on the process of interactions with stakeholders. The INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP expressed disappointment with the lack of consideration of issues that Indigenous communities face in Paraguay, including land expropriation, poverty, hunger, and deforestation.

PARAGUAY explained to Chile and Mexico that it conducted virtual workshops, roundtables and consultations with youth. On Indigenous Peoples, she noted challenges remain, but the government is negotiating within the framework of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to address land expropriation issues.

SWEDEN presented its second VNR, noting while it is well ahead in achieving the SDGs, there are still challenges ahead. He stressed the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach, which focuses on youth involvement, as well as the key role of cities. Sweden highlighted: addressing rising inequalities; achieving a circular economy; localization of the SDGs; more action towards people with disabilities, migrants, youth, and others in vulnerable situations; private sector engagement; a constructive relationship between employers and workers; and research and education. He reiterated the commitment to allocate 1% of gross national income (GNI) to ODA.

FINLAND asked Sweden how its Agenda 2030 bill would avoid negative spillovers and transboundary issues and how Sweden plans to engage youth at all levels of political decision-making. MEXICO asked about green bonds. The LGBTI STAKEHOLDER GROUP noted that many of the recommendations made by its group were not incorporated in the VNR and said there is no institutionalized mechanism to engage civil society.

SWEDEN responded, affirming that the 2030 Agenda bill puts policy coherence at its center and further, it is working with environmental institutes to develop new tools to track SDG progress and possible negative spillovers and transboundary impacts. He said Sweden is pleased with the recent issuance of its first green bond but will not be satisfied until all bonds are social bonds. He acknowledged the need to find new ways to ensure diversity and the views of different stakeholders are reflected in a meaningful way.

Closing of the HLPF

ECOSOC President Akram opened the closing session of the High-level Segment of the 2021 HLPF on Thursday afternoon, 15 July, and presented the draft Ministerial Declaration (E/HLPF/2021/L.2) for adoption. He expressed appreciation to Amb. Jukka Salovaara (Finland) and Amb. Mohammed Hussein Bahr Aluloom (Iraq), who facilitated the negotiations on the declaration. He emphasized the draft contained no programme budget implications. He then announced that the Russian Federation had submitted three amendments.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION introduced the three amendments (E/HLPF/2021/CRPs.1-3). In paragraph 20, it disagreed with the “top billing” of climate change and proposed alternative language that inserted “a climate-responsive focus is a component of sustainable economic recovery.” On paragraph 25, on gender equality, he referenced Russia’s historic opposition to the language used and added linking the issue to the COVID-19 pandemic would

inappropriately allocate resources. On paragraph 36, on biodiversity, he expressed opposition to cooperation of the human-animal-plant sectors, nature-based solutions, biodiversity-health interlinkages and coherence between biodiversity and climate policies, on the grounds of economic interference, and said this should be addressed by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its negotiations on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Many opposed these proposed amendments. Slovenia, on behalf of the EUROPEAN UNION and many others, underlined that recovery strategies and investment decisions that promote, rather than undermine, the Paris Agreement and global biodiversity goals can achieve long-term prosperity. NORWAY, on behalf of many states, “regretted with deep concern” that consensus had been broken on the issue of gender equality, highlighting the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women. The UK, on behalf of many states, stressed that the draft Declaration reflected agreed language from the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the 2030 Agenda, as well as growing international acknowledgement of the inseparability of the climate change and biodiversity crises.

The three amendments were rejected by votes of: 7 in favor, 130 against and 3 abstentions; 4 in favor, 130 against and 3 abstentions; and 3 in favor, 131 opposed and 4 abstentions, respectively.

ISRAEL then proposed deleting paragraph 29, which includes language on removing the obstacles to the full realization of the right to self-determination of peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation. The proposal failed by a vote of 98 to retain, 4 to remove, and 40 abstentions, leaving the paragraph in the declaration.

The Ministerial Declaration was then adopted by acclamation.

Guinea, on behalf of the GROUP OF 77 and CHINA, expressed disappointment that some delegations broke the silence on minor issues that contradict the good faith negotiations. The group joined the consensus to adopt a robust Ministerial Declaration that takes the realities of developing countries into account, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and called for the necessary means of implementation for development.

Slovenia, on behalf of the EU and its Member States, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, and the Republic of Moldova, regretted the need to vote on paragraphs that address cross-cutting issues fundamental to the 2030 Agenda, including gender equality. She lamented language in the Declaration is not as ambitious as it could be, does not reflect existing commitments to health, climate change, and biodiversity loss, and lacks reference to the One Health approach. She also said a bolder commitment for a post-2020 global biodiversity framework is needed, not a reference to the expired Aichi Biodiversity targets.

Canada, on behalf of CANADA, AUSTRALIA, AND NEW ZEALAND, said now is not the time to edit the SDGs or compromise on ambition. He said we need more ambition on gender, ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights, climate change, and a joint approach to protect human, animal, plant and ecosystem health through the One Health approach.

The HOLY SEE welcomed: language reaffirming that eradicating poverty is the greatest global challenge; the positive contribution of migrants to sustainable development; and the call to support the most vulnerable countries, especially LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. He underscored that language on children’s rights should be considered within the context of the family. He also registered his delegation’s

reservations on the following three terms: sexual and reproductive health, of which abortion is not a dimension; family planning; and gender and its derivatives.

HUNGARY welcomed the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration, but stated it was not in a position to support the paragraphs relating to migration, in particular recognizing positive contributions of migrants to inclusive growth and sustainable development, and called for not singling out migrants, as this could exclude other groups.

The US welcomed the Declaration, highlighting references to transparency, good governance, environmental protection, empowerment of women and girls, and rule of law. He expressed concerns, however, about: the omission of the One Health approach, child labor, sustainable infrastructure, and global supply chains. He added that the Declaration inappropriately captures several issues related to trade, including intellectual property and technology transfer, which he said are beyond the scope of the HLPF.

MEXICO stressed the need for flexible language on intellectual property with regard to vaccines, since sustainable recovery means leaving no one behind, and leaving people without vaccines means leaving them behind. He also noted the omission of the One Health approach, and called for strengthening efforts to support marginalized people, as they can also be agents of change for sustainable development.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION welcomed the adoption of the Declaration and regretted that its proposed amendments were not adopted. He dissociated his country from the contents of paragraphs 20, 25 and 36, which his country does not consider to be agreed language. He objected to the participation of children in the SDG process until they reach the age of majority.

The UNITED KINGDOM expressed satisfaction with the adoption of the Declaration, reaffirming support for climate, gender, biodiversity, and human rights. He joined others in expressing disappointment over the omission of the One Health approach. He also recommended more of a focus on implementation and using concise and more action-oriented language in future declarations.

TURKEY stressed that climate change and gender equality are too complex to be addressed by Member States alone and require international cooperation. She also cautioned against language in paragraph 8, which addresses SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), maintaining that certain targets under this SDG are given more importance than others, and maintained that all the SDGs and targets should be implemented in a holistic manner.

IRAQ acknowledged that as co-facilitator, his delegation worked over four months to negotiate the Declaration and applauded this moment of hope and optimism for the 2030 Agenda and post-COVID-19 recovery.

GUATEMALA disassociated with paragraph 8 of the Declaration, stating that international watercourses are a matter of bilateral treaties.

SWITZERLAND expressed disappointment with the absence of strong language on the rights and inclusion of women and girls, pointing to the omission of reference to sexual and reproductive rights.

The REPUBLIC OF KOREA said a sustainable recovery requires consideration of the human-nature relationship, but the Declaration does not address this. He also noted discrepancies with language in paragraph 8, echoing the sentiments of other delegations.

ISRAEL disassociated itself from the language on foreign occupation in paragraph 29.

IRAN emphasized its support for the Declaration only where it did not conflict with national laws, traditions, and norms, and rejected coercive financial and trade measures as incompatible with the UN Charter.

ETHIOPIA rejected paragraph 8, saying transboundary cooperation on integrated water resources management is controversial language.

In his closing remarks, ECOSOC President Akram said that “unless we take bold actions, we will be unable to achieve most of the SDGs by 2030.” He advised the world must quickly contain and defeat the pandemic and the COVID-19 vaccine is a global public good that must be made available to all. He noted four key priority areas for a more equal world:

- strengthening health systems;
- financing to address all aspects of pandemic recovery, SDG achievement, arresting climate change, and the triple environmental crises;
- poverty and hunger, with attention to the most vulnerable; and
- relying on the UN system to steer the paradigm shift in methods and modalities through international cooperation.

UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed noted the immense challenges faced by sustainable development partners in the last year and said pandemic recovery policies can be the foundation to achieving the SDGs. She highlighted digitization, digital education, and social protection systems, and drew attention to the need to restart economies and accelerate realization of the SDGs by boosting gender equality, decent work, and climate actions. She expressed hope that decisions at upcoming summits would “get us back on track.”

ECOSOC President Akram adjourned the 2021 HLPF at 5:55 pm EDT (GMT+4).

Ministerial Declaration

The 2021 HLPF Ministerial Declaration reaffirms the 2030 Agenda as a plan of action and global blueprint to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, build back better, and prevent future pandemics. The Declaration acknowledges that the COVID-19 pandemic has already undermined years of development efforts and recognizes the equitable, affordable access to vaccines as the mainstay of global recovery and that public immunization is a global public good. It further:

- supports the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A) and its COVAX facility, and calls on the public and private sector to fill funding gaps;
- encourages countries to actively support COVAX and the WHO, including by sharing excess vaccine doses;
- welcomes access to concessional financing and other financial measures to help developing countries meet national immunization requirements, improve national health systems and infrastructure, and progress towards universal health coverage;
- calls for the rapid scaling up and expansion of vaccine production globally, in accordance with WTO rules; and
- stresses that to achieve a full recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts must be enhanced to realize the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, and, by 2030, implement

integrated water resources management, at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation.

The Declaration also:

- reaffirms the importance of addressing regional challenges and welcomes contributions of regional multi-stakeholder platforms to the VNRs;
- commits to involving and empowering local authorities to ensure local ownership of SDGs, noting VLRs as a useful tool; and
- emphasizes the importance of the participation of youth in implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and commits to include youth in the development and assessment of strategies and programmes.

For SDG targets that matured in 2020, the Declaration supports fully taking into account the related ongoing intergovernmental processes to allow updated targets to reflect a suitable level of ambition for 2030.

The Declaration outlines key actions under the SDGs reviewed in 2021:

- SDG 1: calls for nationally appropriate social protection systems and notes the need to ensure and promote a multidimensional coordinated approach to eradicate poverty.
- SDG 2: reaffirms the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger; emphasizes the need for concrete actions to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition, and ensure inclusive, resilient and sustainable food systems; and calls for countries to ensure access to safe, sufficient, affordable, nutritious and diverse food year-round and promote healthy and balanced diets through sustainable food systems.
- SDG 3: calls for increased action to achieve universal health coverage and strengthened action to reduce premature mortality from non-communicable disease (NCDs), and assist low-and middle-income countries in their efforts to reduce mortality and morbidity from NCDs.
- SDG 8: promotes a sustainable and inclusive economic recovery, decent work for all, including in the informal economy, structural economic transformation, including expanding digital and mobile banking services; supports and facilitates access to finance for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises to build their capacity to continue their operations and to help restore jobs and incomes; and supports the prohibition and elimination of child labor.
- SDG 10: says the national responses to the COVID-19 pandemic must be gender-responsive; reaffirms commitment to achieving gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls and the full realization of the human rights of all women and girls; calls for the leadership and full, effective and equal participation of women in decision-making; commits to stepping up efforts to fight against racism, all forms of discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, stigmatization, hate speech, as well as negative stereotyping based on religion, belief and nationality; recognizes that digital inclusion is an integral part of social and economic inclusion; and calls upon Member States to take steps to support the full inclusion of migrants in the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.
- SDG 12: calls for enhanced efforts to improve global resource efficiency in consumption and production, and decouple economic growth from environmental degradation; supports developing countries to strengthen their scientific and technological capacities, and ensure that people have relevant

information and awareness for sustainable consumption and production patterns; calls on countries to intensify efforts to scale-up the implementation of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production; and requests the UN system, in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, to support countries in the design and implementation of sustainable consumption and production policies, tools and solutions.

- SDG 13: recognizes the synergies between the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, and reaffirms commitment to strengthening the implementation of the Paris Agreement and finalizing outstanding issues of its work programme; urges countries to institute sustainable, inclusive and climate responsive economic recovery policies from the COVID-19 crisis as an important element of a sustainable growth strategy and an immediate investment in climate-resilient, inclusive and just transitions, and urges parties to communicate or update ambitious NDCs, noting they should reflect highest possible ambition.
- SDG 16: commits to intensify concerted global efforts to prevent and combat crime by making criminal justice systems more effective, accountable, transparent, inclusive and responsive, and by facilitating and strengthening international cooperation in criminal matters.
- SDG 17: commits to promoting public engagement and innovative partnerships through a whole-of-government approach, regional and local mobilization and actions, and meaningful participation and involvement of communities, people, civil society, volunteers, academia, and the private sector; commits to strengthening cooperation to close the digital divide within and among countries; stresses that fulfilling ODA commitments is urgent; welcomes the operationalization of the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries, and invites Member States, as well as international organizations, foundations and the private sector, to provide voluntary financial contributions and technical assistance.

The Declaration further prioritizes a number of issues. On finance, the Declaration highlights:

- impacts of the pandemic on the graduation from the LDC category;
- the potential development of a multidimensional vulnerability index for SIDS;
- the challenges facing middle-income countries;
- increased efforts to mobilize resources to support the pandemic response and to provide LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS with assistance, taking into account their special vulnerabilities;
- bilateral and private creditors should participate in the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative;
- the call for the IMF to channel special drawing rights on a voluntary basis.

On SDG interlinkages and synergies with other intergovernmental processes, including under the CBD, the Declaration calls for:

- parties to the CBD to commit to achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and implement the three objectives of the CBD and the Cartagena and Nagoya Protocols;
- increased ambition and urgency to protect wildlife and to reverse the trends in environmental degradation;

- nature-based solutions or ecosystem-based approaches and mobilizing and significantly increasing financial resources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems as an integral part of pandemic recovery strategies;
- recognizing that human, animal, plant and ecosystem health are interdependent, and emphasizing the need for an integrated approach that fosters cooperation between environmental conservation and the human, animal and plant health sectors in line with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and, to that end, strengthening cooperation among the WHO, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), and UNEP;
- addressing biodiversity and health linkages holistically to prevent and mitigate future pandemics;
- a coherent approach for addressing biodiversity loss, climate change, and ecosystem degradation;
- concerted action to implement and enhance synergies between the outcomes of all relevant major UN meetings in the economic, social, and environmental fields;
- equipping domestic institutions to better address interlinkages, synergies and trade-offs between the SDGs and targets through a whole-of-government approach; and
- accelerated action to achieve the targets of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

On digitization, digital access and technology, the Declaration calls for enhancing and promoting digital capacity-building, infrastructure, connectivity and technical assistance; actions to bridge the digital gap; and supporting countries to build policy and administrative capacity for the effective and efficient taxation of the digital economy.

A Brief Analysis of the 2021 HLPF

Four million lives lost. More than 100 million people pushed back into poverty. This was not the future anyone expected when the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in 2015. “Global poverty is now expected to be at 7 percent by 2030—only marginally below 2015 levels. And with the global temperature increase already at 1.2°C, we are on the verge of the abyss,” warned UN Secretary-General António Guterres during the 2021 meeting of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

Guterres was not alone. Throughout the eight-day meeting, participants delivered stark messages about the dramatic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This brief analysis examines what we learned from the review of implementation of the SDGs at HLPF 2021, framed in excerpts from Secretary-General Guterres’ statement to the HLPF.

“This High-Level Political Forum is intended to assess progress on the 2030 Agenda”

The 2021 HLPF marked the second time the HLPF had to be held virtually due to the pandemic. Some 19 months into a pandemic that has shut down international travel and standard approaches to UN meetings, the HLPF demonstrated humanity’s agility to adapt to changing circumstances. Despite remote participation from different corners of the world and associated time zone challenges, there were fewer bandwidth issues and technical difficulties in comparison to

the 2020 HLPF and other international meetings held early in the pandemic. As future generations take stock of this historic crisis, there will no doubt be a socio-economic valuation of the gains and losses of virtual meetings.

But there are other, less quantifiable challenges of holding virtual meetings. The inability to “read the room,” walk across aisles, and work side-by-side with colleagues from different countries remains a gap that technologies—as advanced as they may be—cannot fill. In other UN processes, delegates with decades-long experience often share that successful outcomes can be attributed to trust built over years of in-person meetings and forming personal relationships. As we edge closer to 2030, it remains to be seen if the pandemic helped expedite action or stood in the way of the human interaction and trust needed to recover from global threats.

Yet there is value to an annual collective stocktaking, whether virtually or in person, in a setting that allows governments, the UN system, civil society and the private sector to think about options moving forward. The opportunity to listen to each other’s challenges and share lessons learned and progress achieved provides a sense of common purpose that would be missing otherwise. Thus, HLPF 2021 did manage to instill momentum into SDG implementation.

The Forum reviewed 42 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), and the sessions and panels were diverse and included participation of nine Heads of State and Government, over 100 ministers and other high-level officials, demonstrating continued commitment to the 2030 Agenda. It did not go unnoticed that the meeting had a visibly stronger presence of women. The five Executive Secretaries of the UN regional commissions formed an all-female panel on regional challenges and opportunities. More remarkably, the panel on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI)—a traditionally male-dominated field—was not only overwhelmingly represented by women, but most of the women were from the Global South. Gender parity in related leadership positions is crucial for the realization of the 2030 Agenda. Based on numbers, the experience of the 2021 HLPF bodes well for the future.

“We must face facts: Rather than progress, we are moving farther away from our goals”

“The year 2020 was an extraordinary time in human history,” opened the Secretary-General’s report on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated geographic, economic, health, and gender inequalities, leading to a vicious cycle of prolonged contagion. Underlying these issues are the needs for technology and funding to improve parity. To that end, the 2021 HLPF paid particular attention to pandemic recovery, the digital divide, and financial reform in advancing recovery.

On pandemic recovery, many participants from civil society and the Global South stressed the overarching priority of “vaccine equity.” Many called for increased social protections and universal health coverage, two issues that also featured prominently in the VNRs.

COVID-19 also brought much needed attention to the digital divide and its increasing role in either separating or bringing together the “haves and have-nots.” This was particularly apparent in discussions on education, where only those with internet access were able to continue their schooling. Many, particularly girls, may never return to school, contributing to a surge in child marriage and

an increase in child labor. The digital divide also contributes to a widening of the formal and informal sectors, allowing less labor-intensive occupations to carry on more seamlessly and safely in the face of lockdowns and strict social distancing measures.

On the economic front, global gross domestic product (GDP) decreased by an estimated 4.6% in 2020. As of February 2021, 36 low-income countries were either in sovereign debt distress or at a high risk of falling into such distress. The equivalent of 255 million full-time jobs were lost and nearly one in every three people could not access adequate food in 2020—an increase of nearly 320 million people in one year! In some countries, the pandemic has set back SDG progress by 10 years.

In this context, statements during the 2021 HLPF emphasized the need to address finance, partnerships, the digital divide, and equality and equity as the cornerstones to building back a better and more resilient world. The small island developing states (SIDS), in particular, focused on this issue, stressing the need for a multidimensional vulnerability index that would more adequately reflect their situation than the traditional GDP measure, and enable them to receive concessionary loans. While the International Monetary Fund’s announcement of a new allocation of Special Drawing Rights was welcomed, many warned of the increasing debt burdens of many countries and the need to reform the international financing architecture.

“We have the knowledge, the science, the technology and the resources to do so”

Despite the sobering statistics, there were signs that progress is still possible. The panel discussions and the VNRs demonstrated that governments, international organizations, local authorities, civil society, and the private sector know what needs to be done.

Many speakers highlighted that we have the knowledge, the science, and the technology to create a more sustainable world. This was illustrated in the VNRs when countries discussed efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and combat climate change. The Czech Republic announced it is completely phasing out coal production. A number of developing countries described efforts to increase the use of renewable energy. In their VNRs, the SIDS illustrated their efforts to become energy self-sufficient.

Many solutions to global financial challenges were also identified, especially with regard to debt relief, boosting liquidity, social, green and sustainability bonds, South-South cooperation, and scaling up private sector funding. The role of multilateral development banks, blended finance to acquire clean technologies, and a global database to connect stakeholders and options for investments were also mentioned. Clamping down on illicit financial flows and tax evasion, and the US proposal for a global minimum corporate tax rate were also mentioned.

The VNRs have become a key vehicle for monitoring the acquisition of knowledge and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Broad participation—176 out of 197 UN Member States have presented at least one VNR since 2016—also indicates the VNRs have become, perhaps, the core of the HLPF. And the VNR process itself has opened the door to better problem-solving at the national level.

As many noted during their presentations, the preparation of the VNRs provide opportunities for countries to develop their statistical systems to evaluate progress on the SDGs using disaggregated

data. This has built linkages between statisticians and ministries. Increasingly, countries are involving stakeholders, including local authorities, the private sector and civil society, in both the preparation of VNRs and their review—a process that is increasing transparency and inclusivity.

Local support for the SDGs was also highlighted at the HLPF. Support for Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) is growing, demonstrating local ownership of the SDGs. It was reported that the VLR Declaration, which formally commits local and regional governments to reporting on the SDGs, now has 215 signatories from around the world. This makes sense, as several noted, since one-third of the targets must be achieved at the local level. VLRs have helped strengthen multi-level governance, raised awareness about the SDGs, and enabled direct engagement between cities and the UN.

“What we need is unity of purpose; effective leadership from all sectors; and urgent, ambitious action”

While we have the knowledge, science and technology, and it was clear at the 2021 HLPF that everyone acknowledges the direction the world needs to go, what remains to be seen is if this momentum can translate into the actions required. If the Ministerial Declaration is any guide, the political will is still lacking.

The Ministerial Declaration was negotiated in advance of the HLPF so none of the discussions or virtual energy from the Forum played into this outcome document. Unlike in 2020, when lack of consensus blocked adoption of the declaration (there was no procedure to hold a vote in the fully virtual format), in 2021 the closing plenary was held in a hybrid format to allow what has become the method through which HLPF Ministerial Declarations are adopted: voting. On the final day of HLPF 2021, following four months of negotiation, and four votes on proposed amendments that failed to pass, the Declaration was adopted by acclamation and applause from socially distant delegates.

The 2021 HLPF Ministerial Declaration puts emphasis on a resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic as a means to triage concrete, sustainable and just actions that, over the long term, reinforce, stimulate and advance achievement of the SDGs. Yet a number of issues were not included or were not as forward-thinking as some would have hoped. Many countries, for instance, regretted the omission of specific reference to the One Health approach, an issue at the front and center of other international discussions on the COVID-19 pandemic and other global challenges.

Other long-time fissures generated the most debate during the informal consultations on the Ministerial Declaration—and during the HLPF closing plenary—but were not front and center during the meeting. These included the linkages between biodiversity loss and climate change, sexual and reproductive health and rights, transboundary water management, and the right to self-determination of peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation.

Many reiterated a common thread: there is an intrinsic link between pandemic recovery and achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Within and among nations, inequalities and the marginalization of vulnerable groups were exacerbated. Yet many pointed out that these very challenges can be turned into opportunities. For example, as a result of the pandemic, many countries expanded healthcare coverage and outreach to

communities that had been left behind. With stronger evidence for the need for equity and equality, surely the SDGs carry more gravitas in this Decade of Action than ever before. “If the SDGs were easy, like putting a man on the moon, we’d already have done it,” said one panelist.

The HLPF’s messages were loud and clear. Member States have not given up. Despite worldwide setbacks and re-worked strategies due to the pandemic, despite major natural disasters and events of significant political unrest or cultural violence, ministers from both developing and developed countries presented signs of progress in their VNRs. Many with little to show except statistics on pre-pandemic growth still made the effort to note that their governments had not neglected attention to the SDGs in recovery planning. Many highlighted that the 2030 Agenda is serving as a blueprint for COVID-19 recovery.

“Rarely has a society been given the opportunity for such a radical change,” said UN General Assembly President Volkan Bozkir. For the first time in generations, we have widespread public and political support for transformational change, he added. The question remains, can we turn this opportunity into reality?

Upcoming Meetings

Pre-Summit of the UN Food Systems Summit: The Pre-Summit, hosted by Italy, will set the stage for the culminating global event in September by bringing together diverse actors from around the world to leverage the power of food systems to deliver progress on all 17 SDGs. **dates:** 26-28 July 2021 **location:** virtual and Rome **www:** un.org/en/food-systems-summit/pre-summit

Global Education Summit: The Summit will enable the global community to come together and support quality education for all children. The summit will use a hybrid format if travel restrictions allow. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta are co-hosting the summit. **dates:** 28-29 July 2021 **location:** virtual and London **www:** globalpartnership.org/financing-2025/summit

Third Meeting of the Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework: This meeting will advance preparations for the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF). The negotiating process will culminate in the adoption of a GBF by the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). **dates:** 23 August - 3 September 2021 **location:** virtual **www:** www.cbd.int/conferences/post2020/wg2020-03

UN Food Systems Summit 2021: The Summit will launch bold new actions to deliver progress on all 17 SDGs, each of which relies to some degree on healthier, more sustainable and equitable food systems. **dates:** September 2021 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** un.org/en/food-systems-summit/

UN High-level Dialogue on Energy: The High-level Dialogue will be structured around five over-arching themes (energy access; energy transition; enabling SDGs through inclusive, just energy transitions; innovation, technology and data; finance and investment) to ensure an inclusive process for Member States and other stakeholders to identify, develop and accelerate action for universal energy access, energy transitions and energy’s interlinkages with other SDGs. **dates:** September 2021 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** un.org/en/conferences/energy2021

SDG Moment: The second SDG Moment of the Decade for Action to deliver the Global Goals will convene as part of the 76th session of the UNGA. **dates:** September 2021 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sdg-moment/

Youth4Climate - Driving Ambition: The meeting will offer young people worldwide the opportunity to develop concrete proposals ahead of UNFCCC COP 26. It will have four major themes: youth driving ambition; sustainable recovery; non-state actors' engagement; and climate-conscious society. **dates:** 28-30 September 2021 **location:** Milan, Italy **www:** minambiente.it/pagina/towards-cop26-pre-cop-and-youth-event-youth4climate-driving-ambition

Pre-COP Milan: This meeting will provide a selected group of countries with an informal setting to discuss and exchange views on some key political aspects of the negotiations and offer political guidance for subsequent negotiations at UNFCCC COP 26. **dates:** 30 September-2 October 2021 **location:** Milan, Italy **www:** ukcop26.org/pre-cop/pre-cop-milan/

UN World Data Forum 2021: This forum will bring together data and statistical experts and users from all sectors to spur data innovation, mobilize high-level political and financial support for data, and build a pathway to better data for sustainable development. **dates:** 3-6 October 2021 **location:** Bern, Switzerland and virtual **www:** unstats.un.org/unsd/undataforum/

2021 UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP 15): The 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the CBD, the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, and the 4th meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing are scheduled to take place to review the achievement and delivery of the CBD's Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. It is also expected to take a final decision on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, as well as decisions on related topics, including capacity building and resource mobilization. **dates:** 11- 24 October 2021 (TBC) **location:** Kunming, China **www:** cbd.int/meetings/

UN Global Sustainable Transport Conference: This conference builds on the first Global Sustainable Transport Conference, held in 2016 in Turkmenistan. It will underscore the importance of sustainable transport for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change. **dates:** 14-16 October 2021 **location:** Beijing, China **www:** un.org/en/conferences/transport2021/

World Health Summit: The Summit is a strategic global health forum convening leaders in politics, science, medicine, the private sector and civil society, with the SDGs at its core. Central topics in 2021 are: vaccines, the role of the EU in global health, mental health, artificial intelligence, lessons learned in pandemic preparedness, and the WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All. It is convened under the patronage of Germany, France, the European Commission, and the WHO. **dates:** 24-26 October 2021 **location:** Berlin, Germany and virtual **www:** worldhealthsummit.org/summit.html

UNFCCC COP 26: The 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 26) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 16), and

the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 3) is expected to convene in Glasgow. **dates:** 31 October - 12 November 2021 **location:** Glasgow, Scotland, UK **www:** unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/conferences/glasgow-climate-change-conference

5th Session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA): The second part of UNEA-5 will take place under the theme "Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals." Its aim will be to connect and consolidate environmental actions within the context of sustainable development and motivate the sharing and implementation of successful approaches. The in-person meeting of UNEA-5 will be followed by a Special Session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-SS), to be held 3-4 March 2022, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the creation of UNEP in 1972. **date:** 28 February-2 March 2021 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** environmentassembly.unenvironment.org/unea5

Stockholm +50: Sweden will host an international event marking the 50th anniversary of the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment and the creation of UNEP. **dates:** 2-3 June 2022 **location:** Stockholm, Sweden **www:** government.se/government-policy/stockholm50/

HLPF 2022: The 10th session of the HLPF will take place over eight days in July 2022 to review implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. **dates:** July 2022 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf

For additional upcoming events, see sdg.iisd.org/

Glossary

2030 Agenda	2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCTs	Conditional cash transfers
ECOSOC	UN Economic and Social Council
FDI	Foreign direct investment
GDP	Gross domestic product
HLPF	High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
LLDCs	Landlocked Developing Countries
NDCs	Nationally determined contributions
ODA	Official development assistance
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDS	Small island developing states
STI	Science, technology, and innovation
UNDESA	UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNEP	UN Environment Programme
UNGA	UN General Assembly
VLR	Voluntary Local Review
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization