

HLPF 2022 Highlights: Tuesday, 5 July 2022

The 2022 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) opened with expressions of concern over the setbacks the global community has faced since the last HLPF in-person session in 2019. Challenges that were unforeseen when the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in 2015, such as the global pandemic, conflicts and the resulting food crisis, and set-backs in education, were highlighted as reasons we are losing ground on SDG implementation. Speakers expressed optimism, nonetheless, that we can improve the resilience of our socio-economic and health systems.

Opening Session

Collen Vixen Kelapile, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) President, opened HLPF 2022. Delegates adopted the agenda (E/HLPF/2022/1). Kelapile said the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed down 2030 Agenda implementation and reversed progress on many SDGs, but noted that the pandemic had served as a “wake-up call” to tackle fundamental problems facing societies. He highlighted the opportunity to build back better using the 2030 Agenda as a blueprint for recovery.

Amina J. Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General, summarized main messages from the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), noting many countries have begun to introduce innovative policies to build back better, including through debt moratoria, national resilience plans, strengthened social protection measures, and expansion of the digital economy, and emphasizing the need for “deep transitions” to get back on track.

Noting that an additional USD 3.5 trillion is required for climate action in emerging and developing country economies by 2030, Nicholas Stern, London School of Economics, prioritized, *inter alia*, strong policies to incentivize investment, official development assistance, private sector financing, and tripling financing from multilateral development banks.

Stressing the importance of coordination, Suriya Chindawongse, ECOSOC Vice President, called for equity and empowerment, sustainability and synergy, a balance between people and planet, and a harmonized UN architecture to achieve the mutually reinforcing SDGs.

Highlighting the current global food and supply chain crises, the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine, Qu Dongyu, Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, underlined the need to implement a sustainable agro-food system, and that this can be supported by the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub.

Mari Pangestu, Managing Director of Development Policy and Partnerships, World Bank Group, reiterated the Bank’s commitment to green and blue development, including with regard to the reduction of fisheries subsidies and the negotiation of a global instrument on plastic pollution.

Kaylash Satiyarti, SDG Advocate and 2014 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, India, condemned the increase in child laborers and the loss of access to education by children in Sub-Saharan Africa, and

called for increased financing to social protection, teachers, and school feeding programs.

Valentina Munoz Rabanal, SDG Advocate and youth feminist advocate, Chile, noted women’s rights are routinely reversed in times of crises, and condemned the recent US Supreme Court repeal of access to abortion. She noted that reproductive freedom is prescribed by SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being).

Introducing their music video of the song “Next Level,” band members of the K-pop band aespa highlighted the need to prioritize SDG implementation to ensure both reality and virtual reality are sustainable and just.

Building Back Better and Advancing the SDGs

Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, presented the Secretary-General’s report on SDG progress (E/2022/55). He emphasized the need to: address vaccine inequality; prioritize low-carbon recovery; reform the international financial and debt architecture; renew the social contract between governments and their people to deliver global public goods; and generate and use robust data.

Opening the townhall discussion, moderator Nikhil Seth, Executive Director, UNITAR, invited participants to focus on solutions to enable recovery from the pandemic. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UNESCAP), highlighted transformative policies that leave no one behind, financing for development, and multilateralism and regional cooperation. Marta Lucia Ramirez, Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Colombia, for the Like-Minded Group of Countries, highlighted that developing countries have disproportionately borne the brunt of recent global challenges such as COVID-19, energy and food crises, and increasing debt levels.

António Vitorino, Director-General, International Organization for Migration, pointed to the International Migration Review Forum Progress Declaration, which links the global compact on migration with the achievement of the SDGs. Li Andersson, Minister for Education, Finland, underscored the need to invest in education, foster the potential of innovation, and enhance efforts towards gender parity. Linda Yueh, London Business School, called for investments in human capital, net-zero infrastructure, and partnerships, and underlined the need to get buy-in from community stakeholders in building back better.

Emphasizing that the pandemic is not over yet, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization (WHO), underscored: prioritizing primary healthcare; promoting a global architecture for emergency healthcare; enhancing early warning healthcare systems; and providing adequate financing to achieve SDG 3. Anar Karimov, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Protection of Population, Azerbaijan, highlighted his country’s COVID-19 resilience and recovery actions including the establishment of social protection measures, international proposals on universal vaccine access, and employment protections.

Natalia Kanem, Executive Director, UN Population Fund, stressed the need for high quality disaggregated data and increased access to contraception and comprehensive sexual education. Jaime Miranda, Co-Chair, Independent Group of Scientists,

2023 Global Sustainable Development Report, shared the loss he experienced due to the pandemic and called for new beginnings stemming from the collective grief.

Najat Maalla M'jid, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, reported that more children are experiencing violence and that criminal networks are exploiting these vulnerabilities. She stressed economic benefits of education and investing in children from an early age. George Gyan-Baffour, Senior Policy Advisor to the Minister of Finance of Ghana, underscored low progress towards achieving the SDGs and cited global crises, including hindered food security.

Vera Katalinić Janković, Special Adviser of the Croatian Minister of Health, stressed growing attention to the human-animal interface and the need to prevent proliferation of zoonotic diseases. Lynrose Jane D. Genon, Executive Council of Young Women + Leaders for Peace, the Philippines, emphasized the need to increase trust between governments and young people, including through co-owned and co-created national youth strategies.

Ambuj Sagar, Independent Group of Scientists, 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report, said science, technology, and innovation (STI) can benefit from: taking a systemic view; closely considering the user environment; clearly specifying the objectives of STI; and better cooperation. Gabriela Zavaleta Vera, Mas Igualdad, Peru, called for strengthened social protections; ensuring inclusivity in emergency and recovery programmes; and recognition of same sex relationships and gender identity.

Seth Berkley, CEO, GAVI Alliance, stressed the importance of pandemic and routine vaccinations and the need to improve absorptive capacity of low-income countries and communities. Hala El-Said, Minister of Planning and Economic Development, Egypt, emphasized the importance of economic growth, food security, and climate action in Egypt's pandemic recovery.

Delegates then shared their experience and challenges in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and other global crises, including the launch of several initiatives. The session concluded with a performance by Malian singer and guitarist Vieux Farka Touré.

SDGs in Focus: SDG 17 and Interlinkages with Other Goals

Financing a Robust Crisis Response and Investing in the SDGs: Calling the borrowing terms facing many developing countries “unworkable,” Jeffrey Sachs, Director, Center for Sustainable Development, Columbia University, called for: negotiated peace between Russia and Ukraine, truly global cooperation to end the pandemic, and a dramatic increase in official development financing.

Vera Songwe, Executive Secretary, UN Economic Commission for Africa, called for: issuing of new Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) as well as delivering on existing SDR promises; improving the Common Framework for Debt Treatment beyond the Debt Service Suspension Initiative; and ensuring voluntary carbon markets support Africa's just transition.

Providing a preview of the 2022 SDG Report's findings on SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), Yongyi Min, UNDESA, noted that the pandemic has added to the debt burdens of low and middle income countries.

Moderating the panel discussion, Homi Kharas, Brookings Institution, noted the difficulty in securing private finance for sustainable development. Lino Briguglio, Professor, University of Malta, underscored the importance of strong institutions for the mobilization of concessionary financing. Leila Fourie, CEO, Johannesburg Stock Exchange, South Africa, called for, *inter alia*, a strong policy framework to incentivize SDG investment. Ulrich Volz, SOAS University of London, prioritized, *inter alia*, using multilateral and national development banks to leverage private capital.

Other speakers stressed the need to: create decent jobs, formalize the care economy, and negotiate an international legally binding instrument to facilitate cooperation on taxation.

Mobilizing and Sharing Science, Technology and Innovation for an SDG Driven Recovery: Ambassador Kennedy Gastorn, Tanzania, Co-Chair of the 2022 STI Forum, highlighted recommendations from the Forum, including: improving international cooperation to facilitate benefit-sharing and data access; demonetizing knowledge generation; and increasing solidarity to bridge the digital divide.

Mario Cimoli, Acting Executive Secretary, UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, said international STI collaboration needs to go beyond voluntary declarations and should become a fundamental part of trade, investment, and intellectual property agreements to ensure enforcement.

Quarraisha Abdool Karim, UNAIDS Special Ambassador for Adolescents and HIV, emphasized the importance of improving public trust in the scientific method and bridging the digital divide through digital governance, public financing, and digital sovereignty. She noted the recommendation of the 10-Member Group to support the Technology Facilitation Mechanism to create an international network of “banks of ideas” and “funds for innovation” to catalyze and support innovation.

Lawrence Banks, Director General, International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, highlighted the use of biotechnology to address the pandemic and provide climate solutions, emphasizing the need to ensure inclusion of marginalized groups. Jiahua Pan, Beijing University of Technology, underlined the need for a portfolio of technology solutions to address all the SDGs. Chris Sharrock, Microsoft, stressed the need to ensure relevant technology reaches traditionally excluded groups. Violet Shivutse, Kenya, called for the inclusion of grassroots groups in the development of STI policies. Charles Mwangi, Kenya Space Agency, highlighted the Monitoring for Information and Decisions using Space Technology project.

Delegates also addressed the need for corporate social responsibility; the new technology toolbox to advance the SDGs; the role of Indigenous knowledge in the STI discussion; the Global Development Initiative's work on STI; and the need for government spending on high quality science and technology.

Capacity Development and Partnerships to Maximize the Benefits of Science, Technology and Knowledge for Sustainable Development: Jan Beagle, Director-General, International Development Law Organization, highlighted the role of the rule of law in promoting equality and certainty; setting transparent framework for emerging areas like artificial intelligence and e-governance; and empowering historically marginalized groups.

During a fireside chat, speakers touched on the role of public-private partnerships in relieving SDG financing pressures and the importance of engaging other stakeholders, especially youth; benefits of new technologies like machine learning; the importance of an ecosystem approach that accounts for interconnectedness of the Goals; and the need to improve access to education.

In the Corridors

“Welcome home, and let's get back to work!” Many participants echoed UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed's excitement at being back in-person for the HLPF. The need to redouble efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda was clear as delegates convened in-person for the first time since the start of the global pandemic, while the day's official reports underscored the immense challenges the pandemic and its socio-economic reverberations have thrown up for sustainable development. Some lamented it wasn't a full reunion, however, given that many civil society representatives were unable to attend in person due to the late announcement that they should come and subsequent challenges in securing visas and funding. The fate of the Ministerial Declaration was also discussed in certain corners, with some expressing concern it would not survive the silence procedure it was currently undergoing.