



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Building back better and advancing the SDGs

Tuesday, 5 July 2022, 10:00 A.M. - 1:00 P.M.

Secretariat Background Note

Executive summary

The year 2022 is the third year of the global pandemic disease caused by the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). The pandemic has caused extensive suffering and death around the world. Beyond the many millions who have lost loved ones to COVID-19, billions of people have had their physical and mental health, livelihoods and education disrupted.

Large-scale economic disruption has exacerbated inequalities and increased poverty, hunger, food insecurity, and the economic vulnerability of hundreds of millions of people. The number of people in extreme poverty has risen by an estimated 75 to 95 million in 2022¹ due to COVID-19 and is projected to remain well-above pre-pandemic levels, especially in Africa and Latin America. The pandemic has also put a spotlight on the poorest and most vulnerable, including older persons, women, young people, children, low-wage earners, informal workers, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, people in situations of conflict, refugees and migrants.

The pandemic has set back progress towards the SDGs almost everywhere and slowed implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At the same time, historic progress was

¹ [Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, Report of the Secretary General E/2022/xx, advance unedited version](#)



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made at the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) with the adoption of the Glasgow Climate Pact. Today's global challenges, such as recovery and building back from the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and the deteriorating humanitarian situation, require extraordinary efforts to make up lost ground and accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

Extraordinary measures are being taken by governments in the wake of the pandemic to cushion the impact on people living in poverty and vulnerable situations. Yet, inequalities across countries translate into wide discrepancies in the affordability of emergency social protection measures. Moreover, conflict and the current geopolitical tensions have further contributed to rising costs of food, energy and fertilizers, amid food insecurity, fuel shortages, spiking inflation and a refugee crisis. According to the UN Secretary-General's Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance, around 1.7 billion people in the world live in 107 economies that are estimated to be severely exposed to a shock of one of the dimensions of food, energy or finance.

Against this backdrop, countries are still struggling to provide appropriate and sufficient response to the pandemic and its social and economic impacts. While important stimulus packages have been implemented, many developing countries face daunting challenges in building back better from COVID-19 due to lower vaccination rates and more limited access to financial resources leading to tighter fiscal and monetary policies. The loss of vital sources of foreign exchange has contributed to debt distress and the need for debt relief. Employment also remains well below the pre-pandemic level in many countries, and countries also differ widely in their ability to cushion employment and income shocks through social protection measures. The majority of recovery plans have not been well equipped to create



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new jobs, support transitions to sustainability and carbon neutrality or boost long-term investments in the SDGs.



Economic and social resilience are crucial factors in rebuilding societies after two years of successive lockdowns and socio-economic disruption. New fiscal and debt sustainability frameworks, universal social protection and greater investments in sustainable development overall, including in sustainable infrastructure, need to be considered. Countries need to strengthen social protection systems, including floors, and ensure equal access to essential services for all to ensure an inclusive recovery. Well-designed and implemented social protection systems are particularly powerful as they reduce inequalities, build resilience and end the inter-generational cycle of poverty, enabling people living in poverty to move out of poverty. Concrete actions are also needed to mainstream a gender perspective into COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.



Building back better from the pandemic and advancing the full implementation of the SDGs are inextricably linked. The building back better process cannot be achieved without policies that enable transformative change and a just transition towards more inclusive and sustainable development; eradicate poverty and hunger; rein in inequalities, including gender inequality; and take decisive and effective action against climate change, while halting biodiversity losses and environmental degradation.

The 2030 Agenda and its SDGs can serve as the overarching framework for the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic during the current Decade of Action. Implementation efforts need to be bolstered by international solidarity and strong multilateral cooperation as well



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as universal access to the vaccine, so that the world can move to the trajectory of sustainable development.



Objectives

This townhall meeting of the HLPF will take stock of where countries and the international community are with regard to building back better from the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It will take into consideration the serious systemic and other emerging challenges and setbacks related to COVID-19 and the deteriorating humanitarian situation, while also identifying opportunities for building back better. The meeting will be informed by the reports of the Secretary-General on “Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals” and on “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.



The townhall meeting will also focus on the structural transformations needed to make economies more socially inclusive and equitable and environmentally sustainable and analyze whether the measures that are being put in place to recover forward better are really advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda while leaving no one behind. It also will consider whether these measures are gender-responsive and take into account the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women and girls and other vulnerable populations.

The session will also address the current situations and challenges of countries at various levels of development and countries in special situations, including least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, as well as the specific challenges faced by middle-income countries. It will address impacts,



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but also discuss the actions that need to be taken to accelerate implementation of the SDGs through synergies and trade-offs and meeting multiple objectives in a coherent and integrated manner, leaving no one behind.

Proposed questions for discussion

- With less than eight years to achieve the SDGs, how can recovery from the pandemic be used to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the achievement of the SDGs? What lessons learned and opportunities exist to galvanize the political commitment to make the structural reforms we need, and mobilize the financial resources required for a sustainable recovery that advances the SDGs?
- How can we limit the negative impacts of the on-going food, energy and financial crises on the SDGs? How can we keep momentum on development while addressing humanitarian needs?
- How can synergies be best maximized, and trade-offs minimized to advance accelerated actions to achieve the SDGs, step up climate action and leave no one behind?
- Are the emergency social protection and health measures implemented in response to COVID-19 leading to durably strengthening social protection and health systems? Are resources for recovery invested in an environmentally friendly, climate neutral way? How can we ensure that recovery measures are gender-responsive?



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- How can we address the food security situation, including by building on the outcomes of the Secretary-General's Food System Summit?
- What targeted measures need to be undertaken for countries in special situations to ensure that policies and strategies are advancing the implementation of the SDGs? How can we address the challenges faced by middle-income countries?
- What policies, measures and innovations have emerged during the pandemic that hold promise for inclusive and sustainable recovery and how can they be scaled up??