



2023 ECOSOC High-level Segment

Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels

Strengthening UN System Institutions for Resilient Sustainable Development

Thursday 20 July 2023, 10:30 to 13:00

ECOSOC Chamber, United Nations Headquarters, New York

CONCEPT NOTE

Introduction

The United Nations is a unique multilateral institution that provides a space for all countries to cooperate and achieve universally agreed goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals. With its oversight role in matters of operational activities for development, development cooperation and humanitarian assistance, as well as its overall coordination of the UN development system, the Economic and Social Council is uniquely placed to provide a unifying platform for multilateral responses to support policy dialogue and guidance for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Its convening power and stakeholder engagement can help forge consensus among increasingly divergent views on solutions to today's challenges, and advance discussions on multilateral agreements.

As we reach the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, the consensus around the value of multilateral action needs to be shored up so that the global public can be assured that the United Nations and its organs can tackle current and emerging global challenges. These include the erosion of trust and cooperation, the need to fix power imbalances in governance arrangements, climate change, disruptive technologies, and pandemics, to name a few.

COVID-19 underscored the need for foresight planning and adaptability, which are central for building resilience against future shocks, and must be embedded in the strategic frameworks and programme priorities of the UN system, both in its normative analytical work, as well as through rules-based policymaking. Within the ongoing recovery from the pandemic, a foundation of reliable and consistent cooperation is needed to support efforts to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Building trust in the institutions that make up the United Nations development system is, therefore, essential for progress in a world that is rapidly evolving, so as to ensure that future outcomes will benefit all people.

The COVID-19 pandemic also underlined the need for effective multilateralism that is people-centered, representative, transparent, equitable, networked, resourced, mission-focused, flexible, accountable, and future-oriented, with the United Nations at its core. Countries cannot achieve the 2030 Agenda alone, and the United Nations system is well positioned to help navigate the shifting geopolitical landscape by strengthening the institutions that sustain it, informed by the proposals in the report of the Secretary-General's [High-level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism](#).¹

Reporting by the functional commissions of the Council and other intergovernmental bodies and forums provides evidence that multilateral cooperation in response to the pandemic has the potential to reverse negative trends and put the world back on track to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.² However, these bodies as well as the agencies, funds and programmes, could be strengthened or reformed to deliver on their own mandates, foster trust and ensure progress in emerging areas of concern to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

For example, the World Health Organization is acknowledged as pivotal for reducing risk and increasing resilience, but requires adequate institutional, financial and legal resources to effectively perform in this role. The decision adopted by the World Health Assembly to establish an intergovernmental negotiating body to draft

¹ High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism (HLAB), *A Breakthrough for People and Planet: Effective and Inclusive Global Governance for Today and the Future* (New York: United Nations University, 2023).

² *Synthesis of submissions by functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies and forums* (E/HLPF/2023/4).



a WHO convention, agreement or other international instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response reaffirms that strengthening the global public health system is a priority for member States.

Addressing the balance of power is part of the quest to rebuild trust and foster legitimacy and accountability of multilateral governance structures. The reform of the international financial architecture will require a comprehensive and balanced approach to financing sustainable development. This includes a strong commitment to multilateral debt relief and development cooperation, including official development assistance, which remains critical to restoring the fiscal space for many developing countries in the aftermath of the pandemic and other crises and as a precondition for accelerating the recovery and the full implementation of the SDGs. The issues of illicit financial flows and international cooperation in tax matters also need to be taken into account. The adoption of A/RES/77/244 on 'Promotion of inclusive and effective international tax cooperation at the United Nations', is meant to address one aspect of the imbalance in the global financial framework by making international tax cooperation more inclusive and effective.

An improved multilateral debt initiative to support debt repayment suspensions of vulnerable countries would be one step towards the creation of a mechanism to address sovereign debt distress. Mobilizing adequate resources for climate finance is another urgent priority, in the face of increasing environmental instability and the need for disaster risk reduction in many areas and across multiple sectors such as agriculture, energy, water and sanitation, that are fundamental to economic and social stability. The proposal outlined in *Our Common Agenda* to convene a biennial summit of the Group of 20, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretary-General and the heads of international financial institutions offers an opportunity for cooperation and progress.

The potential of the digital revolution, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, can enhance and accelerate sustainable development. But a just digital transformation must prioritize those furthest behind in order to close inequality gaps and prevent further widening of the digital divide. Efforts to increase digital infrastructure and provide access to technology should be equitable, guided by reliable, effective institutions that support national statistical capacities for data collection to help to reduce risk and vulnerability. Digital cooperation and addressing the ethical dimensions of emerging technologies, such as machine learning and artificial intelligence, will be key in this regard.



It is important for ECOSOC to regularly reflect on its role in guiding multilateral efforts to promote rules-based policymaking and implementation that adheres to agreed commitments across multiple and interlinked sectors. The UN system has an important role to play in capitalizing on opportunities for transformative policies and actions that are sustainable and resilient, and leaves no one behind.

Strong institutional support for development cooperation, anchored in the role of ECOSOC and the UN development system, should target the most vulnerable people and countries, with capacity building for social protection systems that provide access to education and health care, food security and nutrition, employment and decent work, which are crucial for achieving resilient and sustainable development. Within and across all sectors of development, the importance of promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women cannot be overstated. These priorities call for renewed commitment of all United Nations entities to working more closely together in every aspect of planning, programming and implementation of activities and in forging effective partnerships with Member States.

Objectives of the session

This interactive panel discussion will focus on how to strengthen coordination and build capacity for UN system institutions to become more resilient, foster trust, and prepare for the future. It will explore how the UN system can help build capacity for more reliable, effective, accountable and inclusive institutions that can deliver progress for sustainable development.

Proposed guiding questions

- What are the lessons learned from the pandemic related to UN response and recovery efforts? Can these be scaled up and replicated?
- What improvements are needed in international norms-setting and institutional support that would better inform country-level policy and decision-making for sustainable and resilient recovery and foster long-term sustainable development?
- How can international institutions, including UN system entities, better integrate and mainstream the principles of resilience across their policies, programmes and activities?



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- How can the UN system support the achievement of national commitments for transformation that the Secretary-General has urged leaders to bring to the SDG Summit in September?
- What role can the Economic and Social Council play in strengthening UN system institutions for resilient sustainable development?
- How can the Economic and Social Council and its system of subsidiary bodies contribute to and help advance ongoing discussions on the multilateral arrangements within the context of the proposals for *Our Common Agenda*?
- How can ECOSOC contribute to addressing the current challenges of multilateralism, through its agenda setting role?