



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General

July 2023

WORD COUNT: 8004

Original: English

High-level political forum on sustainable development

Convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council

10-19 July 2023

Summary by the President of the Economic and Social Council of the high-level political forum (HLPF) on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Council at its 2023 session

I. Introduction

The high-level political forum (HLPF) on sustainable development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council met from 10 to 19 July 2023 at United Nations Headquarters in New York. It included a three-day ministerial segment, from 17 to 19 July. The 2023 forum was the first fully resumed in-person forum since 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The forum examined progress in the context of the theme “*Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels*”. Participants discussed effective and inclusive recovery measures to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and explored actionable policy guidance for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Without prejudice to the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the SDGs, the forum conducted an in-depth review of five Sustainable Development Goals, on clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), affordable and clean energy (Goal 7), industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9), sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), and strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (Goal 17).

A total of 38 countries presented voluntary national reviews, of which one was presenting for the first time, 36 for the second time, and one for the third time. The European Union also presented its first voluntary review.¹

The forum also included an in-person general debate during the ministerial segment from 17 to 20 July 2023, which focused on the theme “*Building momentum towards the 2023 SDG Summit: Transformation for accelerating implementation of the SDGs*”. It allowed ministers and high-level representatives of participating States, as well as representatives of intergovernmental

¹ See Annex: List of Countries and Groups Presenting Voluntary Reviews of SDG Progress in 2023.

organizations, UN system entities, major groups and other stakeholders, to exchange experiences, lessons learned, policy guidance, transformative actions and initiatives for the SDG Summit.

The 2023 Secretary-General's special edition report on *"Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: towards a rescue plan for people and planet"*, prepared in advance of the session, emphasized that the defining principle and promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind is in peril. In the report, the Secretary-General finds that many of the Goals are moderately to severely off track and puts forward five major recommendations to rescue the Goals and accelerate implementation between now and 2030, for the consideration of States in advance of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit.

The 2023 HLPF constituted the conclusion of its second four-year review cycle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Goals. Its outcome serves to inform the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the General Assembly, to be held in September 2023, during which Heads of State and Government will gather at United Nations Headquarters to conduct a mid-point review of progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda and commit to clear action steps for accelerated progress in the second half of delivery.

More than 120 representatives of Government, including ministers, vice-ministers and one prime minister, participated in the forum, along with heads of entities of the United Nations system and other organizations, and more than 800 representatives of major groups and other stakeholders from all regions. Panels in all sessions of the forum included youth representatives as speakers. There were also 12 high-level special events, 204 side events (141 in-person and 63 virtual), 16 voluntary national review labs, and 19 exhibitions.

II. Key messages from the general debate: *"Building momentum towards the 2023 SDG Summit: Transformation for accelerating implementation of the SDGs"*

- 1) Countries have been severely impacted by multiple interlocking crises that have further amplified pressing challenges, including those relating to poverty, food insecurity, inflation, debt and energy. Countries have fallen further behind in achieving the SDGs in the face of these recent challenges. Collective efforts need to be strengthened to achieve the 2030 Agenda.
- 2) Despite the setbacks, the SDGs remain essential. Scientific analysis demonstrates that the SDGs are still achievable if countries collaborate efficiently. The 2030 Agenda is recognized as the common roadmap for sustainable development.
- 3) The 2023 SDG Summit will serve as a unique opportunity to reaffirm the commitment to the 2030 Agenda and take concrete actions to rescue and achieve the SDGs.
- 4) All the SDGs are important and are facing challenges. The current situation regarding food security (SDG 2) and access to water and sanitation (SDG 6) is particularly critical. For all the SDGs, science technology and innovation play a crucial role in overcoming challenges and accelerating progress.
- 5) The commitment to leave no one behind must be reaffirmed, including through actions supporting gender equality and addressing the challenges faced by children and youth.

- 6) Climate action, as well as the urgent need to tackle biodiversity loss and environmental degradation, are key priorities. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to renewable energies in a just and equitable manner are of the utmost importance.
- 7) There is a need for greater support for countries in special situations and the distinctive challenges faced by LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, while also keeping in mind the special challenges faced by MICs.
- 8) Access to financing is a key challenge to achieving sustainable development. Developing countries face significant obstacles due to debt distress, high interest rates, and constrained fiscal space, with limited affordable financing options. Many countries called for more concessional finance, reforms of the international financial architecture and innovative financing solutions, including debt relief for climate action swaps.
- 9) Multi-stakeholder partnerships and global coordination – including with civil society, the private sector and local governments – are critical in achieving the 2030 Agenda. These partnerships must be strengthened through a spirit of trust and good faith.
- 10) Peace and security are prerequisites for sustainable development; there is no sustainable development without peace, and no peace without sustainable development.

III. Additional key messages from the forum

- 1) Halfway to the 2030 Agenda, there is shared concern that the world is off track from fulfilling the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The term “polycrises” signifies the interlinked nature of the current global challenges and indicates that global responses must also be interlinked.
- 2) Now is a time for action. There is an urgent need for effective, accelerated, transformative action at all levels to achieve the SDGs and ensure that no one is left behind. Innovative policies and systemic changes are needed to support the SDGs, counter current global trends and promote multistakeholder collaboration.
- 3) The 2023 SDG Summit provides an important opportunity to augment ambition, political will, and broader social coalitions, grounded in robust scientific knowledge, to catalyze and lock-in the momentum for change, maximizing the benefits and cushioning the costs of the transformations that are necessary for achieving the 2030 Agenda.
- 4) Multilateralism and international cooperation are imperative for effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Global solidarity is crucial for sustainable development.
- 5) The world is falling radically short of funding the SDGs. Massive mobilization is needed, including from private sources. Many countries, particularly in Africa, are allocating more resources for debt service than for public services. The United Nations is the most inclusive and democratic multilateral space for discussing issues of financing for development, including reform of the international financial architecture.
- 6) At the national level, inclusive whole-of-society approaches and mobilizing partnerships, including public-private partnerships, are key drivers for pushing forward advancements and rolling out the benefits of achievements to all.

- 7) Vulnerable populations must be seen as key stakeholders and included in the decisions and actions for SDG implementation. The voices of women, girls and youth must also be amplified and acted upon to achieve all 17 SDGs.
- 8) Clean water and sanitation for all are essential to life and to SDG achievement. Water and waste management systems need to be improved using available data and scientific evidence. Global actions and momentum should continue following the success of the UN Water Conference in March 2023.
- 9) Clean and affordable energy is an essential means for getting back on track to achieve the SDGs and net-zero emissions by 2050. Just, inclusive and equitable energy transitions must be urgently accelerated worldwide.
- 10) Industry, innovation and infrastructure are crucial for advancing economic growth and sustainable development. Mobilizing public-private partnerships and whole-of-society approaches are key drivers in promoting investments in sustainable infrastructure and industrialization.
- 11) To accelerate progress towards sustainable cities and communities, it is important to prioritize affordable housing and sustainable transportation, leverage technology for urban development and build synergies around proven successful initiatives. The Goal on sustainable cities and communities converges with Goals on water, energy and industry.
- 12) Enabling environments for STI that also bridge the digital divide need to be further prioritized and will require enhanced international knowledge exchange and collaboration for capacity building. The active participation of youth, women and the most vulnerable populations in STI is crucial for sustainable development. It is recommended to organize a “Youth in STI Day” during the next STI Forum.
- 13) Local action is key to delivering on the promise of the SDGs to leave no one behind. Local leaders and actors need to be empowered and resourced to localize the SDGs and help deliver the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- 14) Concrete actions are needed to address the resource mobilization challenges faced by countries in special situations. Small island developing States face unique challenges. The least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and many African countries are at risk of being left behind. Efforts should include focus on recovery and building resilience.
- 15) Middle-income countries face challenges and development gaps that are not captured by income-based indicators. Indicators that go beyond GDP are essential to holistically measure sustainable development, guide policy decisions, facilitate international cooperation, and ensure that no one is left behind.
- 16) Data is essential for progress on the SDGs. However, many countries struggle to produce SDG-relevant data, and significant investment is needed in data gathering, data governance, and the analytical capacity to ensure that reliable, substantive, sharable, and responsive data is available to drive transformational change.
- 17) Civil society partnerships are a critical part of ensuring that SDG implementation gets back on track, and the engagement of civil society groups should be ensured. Partnerships at the national and international level are crucial.

- 18) One ECOSOC Vice-President (Indonesia) shared the [annex of transformative policies and initiatives](#) from the ECOSOC system as an innovative outcome of the 2023 ECOSOC Coordination Segment that could inspire implementation at all levels to advance the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

IV. Overcoming the crises, driving transformation for the SDGs, and leaving no one behind

There was strong agreement that the lack of progress on the SDGs requires renewed commitments and transformative action. Participants voiced concerns about the number of people expected to be living in extreme poverty in 2030, the rise in food insecurity, the increase in climate-related disasters, and child mortality. The COVID-19 pandemic slowed development and increased gaps between developed and developing countries. Conflicts and war have resulted in the displacement of millions of people. Price volatility and disruption of supply chains threaten the recovery of the world economy. Groups in vulnerable situations, such as children, indigenous peoples, women and girls and older persons are more intensely affected by these crises.

Panellists presented key actions needed to address the widening SDG financing gap, geopolitical conflicts and climate change, and to promote collective action to address transboundary challenges. International aid to agriculture, improved water management and efficient use of fertilizers were identified as key measures for promoting food security. Risk-informed decision making and increased investments in prevention and resilience building are crucial, as well as trustworthy social institutions and effective legal frameworks that promote transparency and accountability. Many countries struggle to produce SDG-relevant data, and more investments are needed in data gathering, data governance, and analytical capacity to ensure that sharable, reusable, flexible and responsive data are available. Speakers also emphasized the need to overcome siloes and turn crises into development opportunities.

Innovative and sustained policies are needed to address these challenges, including reforming the international financial architecture, promoting multistakeholder collaboration, and targeted investments in health care and education. States were called upon to ramp up financing flows by at least USD 500 billion by 2025, and to adapt the Doha Programme of Action to ensure deliverables. Speakers also emphasized the need to promote best practices, respect for human rights, local partnerships and sustainable finance, and the need to focus on implementation of the SDGs with concrete commitments and timeframes.

V. Review of progress on Goals 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17

SDG 6 and interlinkages with other SDGs: clean water and sanitation

Speakers agreed that water and sanitation must be elevated as a top global political priority, recognized as both a global common good and a fundamental right. Due to the centrality of water as a source of life and the increased risks of inaction, which disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable, a paradigm shift in water management and increased, concerted action, including regular stock-taking, are pivotal. Political will and effective governance for collective water action and global commitment cannot be overemphasized.

There is an increasing urgency to mitigate risks associated with water and sanitation and the development of early warning systems, especially for countries in special situations and in Africa. Leaving no one behind and addressing the needs of women, children and other vulnerable groups is pivotal, including the provision of safe and affordable menstrual health management. It was noted that local authorities must be engaged in decision-making in an inclusive manner and be empowered to act, especially in rural areas and among indigenous populations. Adequate financing is crucial, including innovative financing and the effective, accountable use of tariffs, taxes and both macro and micro loan tools. Additionally, there is a need for a shift in mindset to more pragmatic, scalable, and bankable solutions, especially in recognizing data-centric, evidence-based approaches and scientific validations. Coupled with data and knowledge sharing, this will help extend the technical and financial viability of water policies, and lead to more impactful outcomes and longer-term sustainability.

The multi-dimensional, transboundary and interdisciplinary context of water calls for policy coherence and more effective, outcome-based cooperation among countries, stakeholder groups and institutions at all levels. The appointment of a UN Special Envoy on Water, the adoption of a UN system-wide strategy as well as regular global dialogues on water would be strongly welcomed by countries. Global actions and momentum should continue following the success of the UN Water Conference in March 2023.

SDG 7 and interlinkages with other SDGs: affordable and clean energy

The forum highlighted the urgent need to intensify efforts to ensure universal access to clean and affordable energy and called for action to deliver on the Global Roadmap for Accelerated SDG 7 Action. Affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy underpins the ability to achieve other SDGs and net-zero emissions by 2050. Ensuring universal access to clean and affordable electricity must be an urgent political priority at all levels, especially for least developed countries and sub-Saharan Africa.

Just, inclusive and equitable energy transitions must be urgently accelerated worldwide. Energy action must also ensure that it produces just and equitable outcomes while fulfilling its key role in efforts towards achieving net-zero emissions. Without deep energy decarbonization, achieving net-zero by 2050 will fall quickly out of reach. Many speakers expressed support for strengthening public policy frameworks to support innovations, research and development and capacity-building to build skills and talents, and to integrate climate and human rights considerations. There were also calls for decisive global action towards addressing the issue of clean cooking, which is an area that has seen only minimal progress in recent years and disproportionately affects women and children.

Speakers noted the critical importance of reversing the declining trend of international public financial flows in support of clean energy in developing countries and promoting technology transfers. Strengthening partnerships, including through the Energy Compacts, can increase financing while empowering local communities, including youth, women, and indigenous peoples. It was suggested that a platform for regular intergovernmental dialogue on energy at the United Nations could contribute significantly to strengthening international cooperation.

SDG 9 and interlinkages with other SDGs: industry, innovation and infrastructure

Advancing SDG 9 supports essential systems, such as water, sanitation and transportation, and is pivotal to boost the overall progress on key SDG transitions, such as clean energy, health, education, digital transformation, and climate action. Innovation, supported by science and technology, is an engine of growth that drives transformation and allows countries to develop their economies, provide employment and expand the range of products and services. Countries need to adopt policies, strategies and regulations that promote inclusive and just transitions towards green and digital economies and reduce the digital divide, including by investing in communications infrastructure, increasing literacy, and addressing cultural and religious barriers to using digital technologies. Policymakers should also promote legal frameworks that support responsible and ethical artificial intelligence (AI) and prepare their workforces for an AI-driven future.

Partnerships building, including mobilizing public-private partnerships, is critical to promoting investments in sustainable infrastructure and industrialization. Open and transparent institutions supported by good governance will provide an enabling environment for developing countries to attract and manage investments. There is a need for a larger pipeline of bankable projects as well as transparent appraisals, financing, and competitive procurement to attract private sector investments. Equitable and consistent sharing of benefits is needed between public good innovators and private corporations that profit from taking derivative products to market. A whole-of-society approach, with active participation in decision-making, is pivotal for achieving SDG 9, including the consideration of young people's particular infrastructure needs.

International cooperation and a rules-based multilateral system that promotes justice and transparency play a key role in facilitating the sharing of knowledge and technology, building countries' foresight capacities to anticipate growth sectors of the future and providing financial and technical assistance and capacity-building. Equitable trade agreements that create open environments for investment and entrepreneurship, particularly those that foster and support micro, small, and medium enterprises, are key to ensuring inclusive, sustainable growth and innovation.

SDG 11 and interlinkages with other SDGs: sustainable cities and communities

In light of the accelerating urbanization in developing countries, including four billion urban dwellers around the world, achieving SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities has a far-reaching impact and is critical to the overall achievement of the SDGs. Recent crises are negatively impacting the achievement of SDG 11 and pose the risk that, without strengthened action, two billion more people will be living in slums in the next thirty years. With only 51.6 per cent of global urban dwellers having easy access to public transport, improving access to public transportation is critical to connect urban dwellers to economic opportunity.

Speakers highlighted experiences of local governments in urban crisis response and the need to strengthen multistakeholder partnerships. They contended that the implementation of SDG 11 must begin at the local level and be centred around inclusion, sustainability and affordable housing. Key stakeholders, including youth, called for rethinking cities to focus on affordable housing, sustainable transportation systems, availability of green spaces and accessibility for all.

Increasing collaboration between cities, South-South cooperation, and the sharing of technology and best practices were highlighted as key steps to achieving SDG 11, along with harnessing the power of technology in designing evidence-based policies and initiatives for sustainable urban development. Speakers highlighted efforts to digitalize climate governance for cities and provide

tools for measuring the impacts of urban development initiatives in relation to, for example, reducing urban climate emissions and increasing resilience.

SDG 17 and interlinkages with other SDGs: Partnerships for the Goals

Financing our crisis response and investing in the SDGs

Participants drew attention to the fact that due to the debt crisis, many countries are allocating an increasingly larger share of fiscal income to debt service at the expense of the SDGs and public services. Additionally, the ongoing war in Ukraine is shifting public spending priorities to the military and fossil-fuel industries.

There was a call for States to establish a legal framework to prevent the sovereign debt crisis, giving priority to debt cancellation and a new approach to debt sustainability. The public sector alone cannot finance climate adaptation and the SDGs – massive private capital mobilization and a fundamental reconsideration of the global financial architecture, including measures against corruption and financial crimes, is needed. Blended finance should be leveraged at scale with replicability and speed as a mechanism to crowd in the private sector, and countries should revisit the use of special drawing rights.

Science, technology and innovation: Triggering transformation and sustaining a science driven recovery

Speakers collectively acknowledged the importance of STI for all areas of sustainable development and presented various initiatives that have made progress on inclusive technology transformation and bridging the digital divide. Enabling environments for STI that bridge the digital divide, foster inclusivity and enhance collaboration, need to be further prioritized.

Participants noted that the technological gap between the North and the South has been widening and access to STI must be made available to developing countries. The active participation of youth, women and the most vulnerable populations in STI is crucial for sustainable development, and it is recommended to organize a Youth in STI Day during the next STI Forum. An inclusive technology transformation to bridge the digital divide will also require more collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches that foster trust in science, including strategic approaches to link academia and policymaking are key to more accessible science and actionable policy.

VI. Thematic review

Mobilizing regional action and leveraging regional frameworks to support countries in overcoming crises and moving on to recovery and full implementation of the 2030 Agenda

All Regional Forums stressed the need to reform the global financial architecture, as the current system poses unmanageable debt burdens on developing countries, severely limiting their ability to implement their development plans. Other key issues raised included the need to strengthen national statistical systems to formulate data-driven policies and adequately track SDG progress, and the need to ensure a sound interface between science, policy and decision-making to spearhead innovation.

The significance of redefining business models to promote renewable energies, just transitions and green and resilient infrastructure was also emphasized, particularly in view of the potential of joint projects on solar energy, desalination and wastewater treatment. Another powerful driver of sustainable transformation is digital innovation, provided these innovations are trusted, human-centred and green.

Participants agreed that collaboration and partnerships among countries and stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector and youth, are pivotal. The VNRs thereby not only serve as an accountability mechanism, but also as a tool to engage various actors to accelerate SDG progress. Ensuring vulnerable groups are not left behind was also emphasized. Participants discussed that the VNRs should be forward-looking, based on disaggregated data and inclusive processes. There was also discussion on having VNR countries first present their national sustainable development strategies at regional forums to allow Governments and stakeholders to share knowledge and partner for higher-quality reports. It was also mentioned that regional cooperation can play a central role in promoting peace, stability, and resilience, which are central preconditions for accelerated SDG progress.

Transformation from the ground up: Acting at local level

Discussions highlighted the need to democratize and localize the 2030 Agenda, including through youth engagement and intergenerational solidarity, to achieve the SDGs while leaving no one behind. Engaging the most vulnerable is essential to facilitate change, and influence policies and programmes for targeted actions and budgeting, such as partnering with slum dweller associations to address challenges in achieving SDG 11. Local authorities play a critical role in localizing the SDGs, building capacity, and ensuring coherence between the 2030 Agenda, national plans and local plans.

Delegations shared various examples of local actions, including work with the Village SDGs initiative to provide tools and resources to empower rural communities and efforts to integrate the 2030 Agenda through collaboration between regions and municipalities. The importance of overcoming administrative barriers in implementing sub-regional policies was highlighted. Speakers acknowledged that voluntary local reviews provide unique opportunities to accelerate local action and advance localization of the SDGs. Participants highlighted that the reporting process would be more effective if the local review were an integral component of the VNR.

Multi-level governance, strengthening data ecosystems, multistakeholder engagement, capacity-building of local stakeholders and greater financing at the local level were considered critical for effective localization. The importance of a whole-of-government approach, involving civil society, academia, business and young people, was also emphasized. Participants discussed the urgency of translating commitments into concrete actions and urged local authorities to align their plans with the SDGs, as well as States to empower local authorities to deliver on the SDGs and to mobilize resources to raise public awareness through the use of local and accessible languages.

Small Island Developing States: From recovery to resilience in the face of multiple shocks

Concrete actions are needed to address the resource mobilization challenges faced by SIDS. These include, among others, reforms of the international financial architecture and the adoption of the multidimensional vulnerability index, which would allow for a comprehensive assessment of

SIDS' vulnerabilities and enable the international community to take account of vulnerabilities in development finance decisions. This reform, in conjunction with increased grant-based financing and debt relief, was identified as a key solution to the long-term challenges faced by SIDS.

The need for significant investment in capacity-building measures was a recurring theme. Participants stressed the importance of investing in early warning systems, digital transformation, and in human capital development. Special emphasis was placed on improving SIDS' resilience against all types of external shocks. Several participants highlighted the importance of strengthening SIDS' digital capacities, as the digital transformation is understood as a critical enabler for SIDS' economic well-being and sustainable development.

International cooperation, partnership, and inclusivity, underpinned by equity and fairness, are vital for addressing the disproportionate impacts of crises on SIDS and for building their resilience. The role of youth and women in addressing these challenges was acknowledged. Youth and women need to be empowered through education, leadership development, and policymaking, noting their crucial role in achieving sustainable development in SIDS.

Overcoming middle-income countries' challenges in advancing the 2030 Agenda

While middle-income countries were widely acknowledged as central to achieving the SDGs at the global level, participants emphasized the diverse challenges and development gaps they face that are not captured by income-based indicators. In addition, fiscal constraints and a high debt burden have impeded the investments needed to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and overcome the middle-income trap to achieve inclusive, sustainable, and resilient growth. Energy and digital transformations, including strengthening data collection and analysis, were noted as opportunities in need of financial resources and technical capacities.

Participants called for development cooperation to be better tailored to development needs and priorities – including financing needs – and for more concessional financing, technology transfer, capacity-building, and market access, including through updated trade rules. Growing debt vulnerabilities must be addressed, including through debt relief and innovative mechanisms. There was consensus that measurements that go beyond GDP are critical to better assess the multidimensional nature of development challenges and vulnerabilities, and to guide policy decisions and international development cooperation. The launch of an intergovernmental process to go beyond GDP could be one of the greatest deliverables of the SDG summit.

African countries, Least Developed Countries and Landlocked Developing Countries: Turning the tide, regaining lost ground, and embarking on the road to the SDGs

Least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, and many African countries are the most at risk of being left behind. Efforts for recovery from the poly-crises need to focus on resilience building and structural transformation of their economies. Lack of adequate and affordable financing presents the main impediment for SDGs implementation. Support was expressed for the implementation of the SDG stimulus and the call by the Secretary-General for a complete overhaul of the international financial architecture to ensure that it delivers concrete financial solutions to the countries most in need. Voices of African countries should also be included in discussions on reforms of the global financial architecture. Participants acknowledged

the Doha Programme of Action as an ambitious and transformative framework to deliver long-lasting development gains in least developed countries.

Panellists recognized the importance of South-South and triangular cooperation as an accelerator for the SDGs and emphasized the urgency to include all stakeholders, especially youth and women, into action-oriented conversations. Speakers emphasized the importance of not only acknowledging the differences between countries but also differences within countries, ensuring that all different structures and systems are accounted for. There were several calls to expand the implementation of the SDGs to all sectors, including music and the arts.

Perspectives from major groups and other stakeholders at the mid-point of the SDGs: Towards inclusive transformation

Perspectives of non-state actors were put forward. Panellists from the regions of Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe and Latin America called for a more sustainable, genuinely inclusive, and human rights-centric approach to development. Africa's progress in implementing sustainable development will largely determine whether the SDG commitment to leave no one behind becomes a reality. Although many governments across the world initiated democratic reforms and much has been done to further human rights and development, implementation of commitments often remains shallow and inadequate.

Partnerships at the national and international levels in monitoring, reporting, and implementing are crucial. States underscored the critical importance of civil society in helping to create capacities for on-the-ground SDG implementation, with many highlighting their plans to engage with stakeholder groups at the national level through annual forums, including the private sector, particularly through public-private partnerships. Yet spaces for civic engagement are shrinking, as authoritarian restrictions on civil society are on the rise in many parts of the world. Although much progress has been made in creating mechanisms for engaging civil societies, standing for environmental justice is still extremely dangerous in some parts of the world.

Representatives of both States and major groups noted the need to amplify the voices of children and youth and of groups that are disadvantaged and discriminated against. Grassroots initiatives led by local communities and vulnerable groups offer holistic, inclusive and effective approaches for achieving sustainability, tailored to the unique conditions of each context. Achieving the SDGs also requires investment and training in technologies for gathering data and monitoring and assessing progress towards the SDGs.

VII. Opening of the Ministerial Segment

The President of ECOSOC opened the ministerial segment by acknowledging that, amidst the chaos accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the earth's hottest days ever recorded--it is not the time to panic but the time to act. The 2030 Agenda must be the roadmap for this action, driving stakeholders and States alike toward meaningful change. The world is halfway there and yet nowhere near achieving the seventeen SDGs; this HLPF is the last stop before the SDG Summit this September, and at half-time the game is not yet over.

Two youth representatives delivered messages on behalf of youth and addressed their remarks to every person who was once a child. while no one can choose when or where they are born,

everyone is entitled to a life of dignity, security, joy, prosperity, opportunity, and fresh air. In the face of many global challenges, there is need to focus on our mutual humanity, recovery, resiliency, preparedness, and unity, with an eye on younger and future generations. Youth should not be seen in isolation, but as a part of the core group in building a sustainable world for all.

The Secretary-General highlighted the lack of progress towards the SDG targets. Every country must deliver on the promises of the 2030 Agenda, remember that change is possible, and make 2023 count. The SDG Summit must be met with clear plans and pledges to strengthen action through ambitious national interventions to reduce poverty and inequality, alongside clear policies, investment plans and partnerships to drive progress across major SDG transitions. An SDG Stimulus of \$500 billion per year is needed for investments in sustainable development and climate action. Also needed are changes in business models, debt relief, and expansion of contingency financing for countries in need. This can be achieved with sufficient political will.

The President of the General Assembly focused on the urgent need for rapid, multilateral, and substantive structural change to achieve the SDGs. The world needs to align regulations with announced goals, calculate all externalities, navigate the reduction of negative externalities while increasing the positive, and build a science-based road map of implementation. As a global community, we are still in the game, but the time has come for the game itself to be changed. The financing of this transition is critically lacking, and investments are needed to change the course of development. The SDG Summit will need to convince the world that States will do better in sustainable development. The promise to leave no one behind must be kept.

The Chairperson of the International Panel on Climate Change articulated that limiting climate change is essential for all SDGs. Climate change is a threat multiplier; the complex threats occurring today will only get worse as global temperatures continue to rise. Adaptation efforts have not been sufficient. Deep, rapid and sustained cuts to global greenhouse gas emissions is the best option for sustainable development. The knowledge and technology are in place to tackle climate change. International cooperation, effective ecosystem stewardship, inclusive governance, the sharing of diverse knowledge, and the sharing of benefits and burdens are imperative to shape a future through the choices made today.

VIII. Voluntary Reviews of SDG Progress

During the HLPF ministerial segment, 38 countries presented Voluntary National Reviews, as well as, for the first time, a voluntary review was presented by the European Union. Presenters demonstrated and highlighted the collaboration with stakeholders, such as youth, civil society, the private sector and persons with disabilities, among others, in preparing their VNRs, and expressed commitment to include them more concretely in actions towards sustainable development.

Countries noted the different challenges that the ongoing crises represent to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Yet they remain confident and committed to getting back on track towards the achievement of the SDGs. This commitment allowed countries to approach challenges in a proactive way. They recognized what needs to be done to implement the 2030 Agenda, as well as the progress that has been made in some areas and how countries have achieved it, which has created opportunities to learn from the shared experiences.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and challenges of recovery remain a main concern among countries because of the setbacks they represent for SDG achievement. Countries' vulnerabilities

were highlighted by the pandemic, leading them to reorganize priorities and adjust their 2030 Agenda implementation strategies. Since the pandemic, countries have taken proactive measures to increase the welfare of their people, including the most vulnerable.

One of the most critical elements identified by presenting countries was financing. Countries stressed that access to finance is critical for countries to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. Several emphasized the need to re-think how sustainable development and climate action have been financed thus far, with the purpose of establishing a financing structure that responds to the actual needs of countries and allows effective management of resources, allocating them to where they are most needed. While reform of the international financial architecture was suggested by different countries, it also wasn't the only proposal. Countries considered multiple ways, based on cooperation, in which they can face together the challenges related to financing and funding. There was also a special call to adapt the Loss and Damage Fund and strengthen its operation.

Climate change and environmental protection were key concerns addressed by the VNRs. Presenting countries highlighted the need to deliver strengthened and comprehensive climate action. Many outlined how they are including climate action in their policies and other measures to address climate change. Mitigation strategies, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, building climate resilience, reforestation, and the scaling up of climate finance are some of the areas where they are concentrating efforts. They also noted the importance of compliance with international environmental commitments as well as reliable financing for adaptation measures and moving towards a green economy.

Gender equality and social inclusion were emphasized as significant and cross-cutting, linked directly to the 2030 Agenda principle of leaving no one behind. Countries shared how they are working to guarantee equality and inclusion. They underscored that having the empowerment of women as a priority can help in making progress among the other SDGs.

Several VNR countries noted increasing droughts and the threat of water scarcity as major challenges to ensuring clean water and sanitation and stressed the need for long-term strategies. Some shared their experiences and highlighted that actions to improve the supply, reliability and quality of water included support to the construction and maintenance of water-related infrastructure, especially in rural areas, expanding water and sanitation infrastructure, integrated water resource management, setting institutional frameworks and designing a policy focused on increasing access to clean water and sanitation. States also recognized the key role of water in agriculture and food security.

There was also a special focus and the highlighting of significant progress in investing in and utilizing renewable energy sources. Despite a clear commitment, the progress made thus far in clean energy is still insufficient to accomplish the 2030 Agenda targets. Efforts need to continue to be focused on achieving a just energy transition, which requires investment in renewable energy sources, sustainable energy infrastructure and efforts to expand access to electricity among rural and urban areas. Some countries placed a large emphasis on energy efficiency as a goal itself, noting the importance of technology transfer and capacity building for these purposes.

Countries shared their experiences and approaches to building resilient infrastructure and promoting sustainable industrialization. Among various countries, strategies have been focused on transport infrastructure to enhance connectivity among urban and rural areas, and the establishment of special economic and industrial zones that supports and encourages industrialization and innovation.

Presenting countries emphasized the need to tackle the lack of affordable quality housing as the main challenge to having sustainable and resilient communities. Some stressed that the provision of affordable housing with a special focus on supporting low- and middle-income earners and going further to include specific support to guarantee housing access to youth and female-headed households. Attention was brought to land use, and it was suggested that the main goal shouldn't be expanding the use of land, but to have adequate planning that will lead to a more effective land use. The importance of building hazard-resilient communities was also emphasized, and that it is crucial that States strengthen local government and community participation.

Countries emphasized that having participatory approaches for every SDG is needed for effectively accelerating progress. They also stressed how critical effective multistakeholder partnerships are to the follow-up to the commitments made towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the preparation and elaboration of the VNRs. They also noted the critical role of cooperation among States in the achievement of the SDGs and recognized the special and valuable impacts of both North-South and South-South cooperation.

A key message was that technology and innovation are important for addressing climate change and increasing progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Countries noted, as a cross-cutting issue, the importance of embracing the digital transformation and harnessing the power of technology to achieve the SDGs. Technology is one of the strongest allies and tools and can contribute to achieving progress in almost every SDG. Countries shared their experiences with how technology and innovation helped them to deliver in various ways for the SDGs. Countries also supported and encouraged the transfer of technology.

The importance of data was underscored by various presenting countries, which stated that data collection is crucial for the following up on and monitoring of progress. Some States drew attention to how important it is to have accurate and disaggregated data during decision-making processes and for the establishment of adequate SDG strategies that address each country's specific circumstances and needs.

Countries encouraged good governance practices, as it is key to addressing the SDGs and their targets. Institutional mechanisms, processes and tools for SDG action are critical in ensuring proper planning and effective implementation, as well as for the monitoring and evaluation of goals and targets. These should be joined with the establishment of effective national development plans aligned with the SDGs, adequate financing and resources, as well as ensuring appropriate public sector capacities and capabilities.

Countries stressed the need to continue strengthening and establishing new partnerships and avenues for cooperation. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, it has become evident that common commitments and efforts are required, especially now when only half the time remains to 2030. Countries noted the need for even more strategic and impactful partnerships to accelerate SDG implementation, highlighting the important role public-private partnerships have in contributing to SDG progress. Governments play a key role in providing a conducive enabling environment for every type of cooperation and partnership, but especially in the meaningful inclusion of civil society in policymaking and implementation strategies.

IX. General Debate

The upcoming SDG Summit is seen as a unique opportunity to renew a shared global commitment and take concrete action to rescue the SDGs and achieve the 2030 Agenda. Countries emphasized the need for the Summit to be a moment for ambition, political will, solidarity, multilateral cooperation and multi-stakeholder engagement, and a whole-of-society approach.

Countries reaffirmed their commitments to the 2030 Agenda and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. They also expressed deep concern about the 2030 Agenda being severely off-track, with most SDG progress being slow, stalled or reversed. There were calls for greater efforts to overcome the impacts of interlinked challenges that have impeded progress, including the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery, conflict and climate change. Renewed commitment and collaborative action from the international community is deemed critical to accelerate progress and effectively address the setbacks.

The SDGs remain a key priority, and several countries echoed scientific conclusions that the SDGs are still achievable if countries accelerate their collaboration. The 2030 Agenda is recognized as a common roadmap for sustainable and inclusive policies. Many countries have incorporated the SDGs into their national development plans and policies. Several countries referred to actions highlighted in their VNRs to implement the SDGs, including actions for global and national policy coherence and SDG interlinkages in transformative domestic policies and strategies.

Strengthening partnerships was highlighted as pivotal to achieving the SDGs. Countries emphasized the critical importance of international cooperation as well as cooperation with the private sector. There was recognition that partnerships with the private sector will help foster innovation, mobilization of financial resources, and the implementation of new methods to have a significant positive impact on global societies.

Access to financing was identified as a key challenge in achieving sustainable development. While developing countries grapple with issues of debt distress, high interest rates, and constrained fiscal space, there are only limited options for affordable access to financing. As a result, many countries called for greater access to financing for developing countries, and related actions to ensure stable macroeconomic fundamentals, the full implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the fulfilment of Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitments, the reform of the international financial architecture, financing eligibility criteria, debt restructuring, debt relief for climate action, and access innovative financing mechanisms, including impact investing.

It was widely recognized that increased access to concessional financing is pivotal to get the SDGs back on track. In addition, various countries called for measures beyond GDP, and the application of the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) to improve development assistance. The MVI is regarded as an important opportunity to consider different types of vulnerabilities when accessing concessional resources, particularly to address the impacts of climate change.

Many countries expressed support for the SDG stimulus, which is seen as an important initiative to boost action on financing. Various countries highlighted the need for greater support to countries in special situations, specifically to LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS. Countries also highlighted the challenges faced by middle-income countries in accessing loans and grants.

Countries reiterated their pledge to leave no one behind. The eradication of poverty remains a top priority among countries. Food security was another critical topic of discussion. Many countries noted hunger and malnutrition as major concerns and emphasizing the importance of comprehensive measures to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2. Some countries recognized

the critical role of women in improving food production and distribution and placed particular emphasis on empowering women and promoting gender equality in agriculture.

Gender equality and women's empowerment were recurring themes in many countries' statements regarding sustainable development. Countries highlighted the importance of eliminating gender-based violence, narrowing gender inequalities in various sectors and increasing women's representation in decision-making processes and leadership roles, amongst others. Several countries also announced their commitments and initiatives to solve challenges regarding rights of children and youth. They emphasized the significance of investing in excellent education and encouraging social inclusion to assist children's well-being and development.

Addressing climate action, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation remains an urgent priority. Given that climate change represents an existential threat, bridging the climate financing gap is imperative. Countries noted that a financial architecture that prioritizes accessible financing for disaster risk reduction and climate action is urgently needed. Countries also expressed their support for the Bridgetown Initiative and called for the operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund. Countries also emphasized the unique vulnerabilities of SIDS. Various countries provided specific experiences and plans on climate action, including transitioning to a green economy, reducing carbon emissions, embracing a just energy transition and committing to net zero. Countries also noted the importance of access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy.

In line with the priorities of the HLPF, many countries highlighted access to clean water and sanitation as a key priority. Countries pointed to the critical importance of protecting water resources for sustainable development and emphasized the close link between clean water and sanitation and human well-being, economic prosperity, and environmental sustainability.

Countries also encouraged increased investment in science, technology and innovation as a driver for sustainable growth, pointing to the importance of technology and digital progress for advancing the SDGs and overall development. Digital transformation was also highlighted as a critical component, with calls for bridging the digital divide and ensuring equal access to technology and digital literacy, especially for vulnerable and marginalized communities. In this context, the importance of technology transfer and cooperation in helping developing countries achieve their sustainable development goals was also highlighted by various countries. Some countries also called for more transparency, accuracy, timeliness, relevance, and quality in data collection, including in support of the VNRs.

Several countries noted the negative impact of conflict and terrorism on their countries' progress towards the SDGs and emphasized that peace and security are prerequisites for sustainable development in line with the 2030 Agenda. Countries noted that equal access to justice is a critical enabler to achieving the SDGs.

Annex: List of Countries and Groups Presenting Voluntary Reviews of SDG Progress in 2023

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| 1. Bahrain** | 21. Lithuania** |
| 2. Barbados** | 22. Maldives** |
| 3. Belgium** | 23. Mongolia** |
| 4. Bosnia and Herzegovina** | 24. Poland** |
| 5. Brunei Darussalam** | 25. Portugal** |
| 6. Burkina Faso** | 26. Romania** |
| 7. Cambodia** | 27. Rwanda** |
| 8. Canada** | 28. Saint Kitts and Nevis* |
| 9. Central African Republic** | 29. Saudi Arabia** |
| 10. Chile*** | 30. Singapore** |
| 11. Comoros** | 31. Slovakia** |
| 12. Croatia** | 32. Tajikistan** |
| 13. Democratic Republic of the Congo** | 33. Timor-Leste** |
| 14. Fiji** | 34. Turkmenistan** |
| 15. France** | 35. United Republic of Tanzania** |
| 16. Guyana** | 36. Uzbekistan** |
| 17. Iceland** | 37. Vietnam** |
| 18. Ireland** | 38. Zambia** |
| 19. Kuwait** | 39. European Union* |
| 20. Liechtenstein** | |

*First time presenters

** Second time presenters

*** Third time presenters