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ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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"BUILDING BACK BETTER FROM THE CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) WHILE ADVANCING THE FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT"

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the world and people's lives in multiple ways. The crisis has posed enormous challenges to sustaining progress towards the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As countries become more accustomed to managing the health and other effects of COVID-19, optimism has grown that, even if the virus becomes endemic and further mutates, it will be more like seasonal influenza than the devastating disease it was everywhere in the first two years and remains today in parts of the world and among populations that are as yet largely unvaccinated.

Health professionals and policy makers naturally wish to learn lessons on how better to manage future pandemics and, ideally, we should also be willing to invest in ways of reducing the likelihood of pandemics, notably by relieving humanity's intense pressure on natural ecosystems and species. The cost-benefit calculus strongly suggests such investments are worthwhile.

All of society has been affected profoundly by the pandemic and the lessons to be learned thus extend far beyond the health sector. COVID brought the economy and people's lives to a standstill for considerable periods in many parts of the world and significantly slowed economic growth, increased unemployment, raised poverty and hunger and exposed deep-seated inequalities in many countries around the world.

The building back better process should focus on putting in place policies that drive fundamental transformation towards sustainable development; eradicate poverty and hunger; rein in inequalities, including gender inequality; build resilience; and take decisive and effective action against climate change, while halting biodiversity losses and environmental degradation. The question arises: will governments and other actors find the will to address these issues? The evidence reviewed here is decidedly mixed but generally discouraging on this score.

Then, just as countries were beginning to see a light at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic tunnel, the war in Ukraine has caused sharp increases in the prices for fuel, food, fertilizer and selected metals/minerals. Increases in the prices of energy and food will hit importing countries disproportionately, as well as the poor in all countries most severely. This would set back further progress towards the SDGs.

In order for international community to achieve the SDGs and recover sustainably from the pandemic, it needs to minimize further damage from the pandemic, generate a speedy recovery from the damages, hold on to and build further upon the positive changes introduced to the healthcare, social protection and public institutions during the pandemic, and ensure that recovery pathways accelerate the transformations necessary for bolstering the SDGs, including those that are planet-related, thereby countering negative environmental effects and more generally reenergizing the momentum toward sustainable development.

The Secretary-General's report, Our Common Agenda, seeks to re-energize efforts towards SDG achievement ("turbocharge" in his words) with manifold proposals laid out in the report. How much of it will materialize will depend on political leadership and will to strengthen multilateralism and global solidarity internationally and send strong and ambiguous signals followed by laws and policies nationally to steer both public and private investment and action.

Crises stress test institutions, and the institutions of international cooperation were sorely challenged during the pandemic, with the COVAX facility established with a view to vaccine equity frustrated for some time in its efforts to procure an adequate vaccine supply for low-income countries. Then, in the midst of the pandemic, COP26 of the UNFCCC took place in Scotland, with developed countries failing to close the financing gap to meet the $100 billion commitment to climate finance for developing countries by 2020. Multilateral cooperation has been further strained by the invasion of Ukraine.

So, what does all this portend for the SDGs and 2030 Agenda in the coming 7 ½ years? How can the international community, national governments and other stakeholders stay the course and accelerate progress?

There is an evident need to support economic recovery across the globe, including in countries whose fiscal space has been severely compromised by the loss of revenues during the pandemic. Sovereign debt stresses in hard-hit countries need to be alleviated through multilateral action including both public and private lenders. Governments need to be much more proactive in steering recovery investments towards socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable investments, including those designed to accelerate the phase-out of fossil fuels.

The social fault lines exposed by the pandemic should provide guidance to governments on how to strengthen social protection measures and ensure that recovery investments leave no one behind. More explicit actions are needed to engage vulnerable groups in decisions on policy direction and resource allocation. The net zero transition over the coming few decades must begin in this decade, and this will call for active dialogue with all those likely to be affected to work towards a 'just transition'.

Far more ambitious climate action is absolutely imperative in the coming years, and in devising ambitious mitigation and adaptation plans and investments, the potential for nature-based solutions needs far greater attention and concrete measures. This will also require engagement of indigenous peoples and local communities whose lands, forests and other natural assets hold the potential to contribute and who should fairly benefit from those contributions to climate action as well as biodiversity conservation. Closing the biodiversity financing gap is urgent, just as closing the climate financing gap, and all countries contributing significantly to climate change and biodiversity loss should contribute to closing that financing gap in accordance with their respective capabilities.

I. INTRODUCTION: BUILDING BACK BETTER AMIDST AN ONGOING PANDEMIC

2022 is the third year of the global pandemic disease caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) 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 lives, livelihoods, educations, physical and mental health disrupted.

Human beings and societies are adaptable and have adapted to the exigencies of life in a global pandemic, to varying degrees. Even with adaptation, however, the pandemic has imposed huge human costs. Education shifted in many countries from in-person to online instruction, but for many students around the world, the latter has been a far-from-perfect substitute for the former.

Large-scale economic disruption has increased the poverty, hunger and economic vulnerability of hundreds of millions of people. Countries differ widely in their ability to cushion employment and income shocks through social protection measures. Moreover, in many developing countries, the loss of vital sources of foreign exchange - due for example to the near total shutdown of international tourism and travel for many months - has contributed to debt distress and the need for debt relief.

Even before the pandemic hit two years ago, progress towards the sustainable development goals (SDGs) was uneven across goals and countries, with many developing countries lagging behind on goals and targets measuring basic human well-being (poverty rates, food security, access to affordable health care) [1] and many developed countries lagging behind on the environment-focused goals, notably tackling climate change. The pandemic has set back

[1] See the Gates Foundation's Goalkeepers Reports, e.g.:
https://www.gatesfoundation.org/goalkeepers/report/2021-report/

progress towards the SDGs almost everywhere and slowed implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. Extraordinary efforts will be needed to make up lost ground and accelerate progress. To some degree, extraordinary measures are being taken by governments in the wake of the pandemic to cushion the impact on the poor and vulnerable populations. Yet, inequalities across countries translate into wide discrepancies in the affordability of emergency social protection measures. Thus, while governments worldwide have put in place upwards of 1,600 short-term social protection measures in the wake of the pandemic, more than half of the world's population does not benefit from such measures. [2]

This report takes stock of where countries and the international community are with regard to implementation of the 2030 Agenda, considering the serious challenges and setbacks caused by COVID-19 but also identifying opportunities for 'building back better' through deep structural shifts to make economies more socially equitable and environmentally sustainable.

A sizeable number of countries - most classified as least developed countries (LDCs) - have yet to find the formula for achieving sustained and robust economic growth. This is the challenge addressed in the first instance by SDGs 8 and 9. A much larger group of countries faces the challenge to build more just and inclusive societies where all people can thrive, irrespective of such circumstances as ethnicity, social status, gender, age, disability or other identifiers. This is the essence of the call in the 2030 Agenda to 'leave no one behind'.

We have been starkly reminded of entrenched inequalities by the pandemic - notably, in the vulnerabilities of different social groups within countries as well as the stark inequalities in access to life-saving vaccines and therapeutics across countries and regions (highlighting the linkages between SDGs 3 and 10). The question we would like to be able to answer here is whether this recognition has led governments and other actors to mitigate such inequalities on a sustained basis in the years and decades ahead.

[2] UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021, UN Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/

It is probably too soon to provide a definitive answer, but one measure of the durability of inequality mitigation measures would be their incorporation into national legislation.

Besides reducing inequalities, environmental sustainability is the other imperative of 'building back better'. There are a few aspects to this, the most urgent of which are tackling climate change (as called for in SDG 13) and halting biodiversity loss (as called for in SDGs 14 and 15).

Recall that, soon after the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in 2015, governments adopted the Paris Agreement on climate change to tackle what has become an existential threat to many nations and communities. Thus, in devising COVID-19 recovery plans, governments and all other actors must be seized by the imperative to move national economies and the global economy towards net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by mid-century. They must also prepare their economies and societies for weathering and adapting to the impacts of climate change which can no longer be avoided.

Tackling climate change must go hand in hand with ensuring fairness and equity. For, climate change and the response to it will impose costs and stresses on societies which are unequally borne, either exacerbating pre-existing inequalities or creating new ones (as for example when workers in certain industries and localities face job losses from economic restructuring). Thus, ensuring a fair sharing of the costs and benefits of transformation is crucial to being able to implement ambitious measures aimed at achieving net-zero economies at the earliest possible date this century.

Halting biodiversity loss and beginning to restore nature is another aspect of environmental sustainability which requires urgent attention, not only to achieve SDGs 14 and 15 but also as a contributor to tackling climate change through so-called "nature-based solutions" like forest and mangrove protection and restoration, agroecology and other measures which contribute to storing carbon while providing livelihoods, food security and resilience to communities.

In reviewing progress and looking ahead, we must be guided not just by what governments and other stakeholders have adopted in the SDGs themselves but by the broad principles that shape the 2030 Agenda – as captured in summary form by the 5 Ps of the preamble: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership, and the commitment to leave no one behind. We must also remain cognizant of the universality of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and the commitment this implies to enhanced international cooperation. The need for enhanced cooperation is nowhere more evident than on the climate change front, but it extends to multiple other areas where inequalities and differential endowments, capabilities and vulnerabilities exist. If the 2030 Agenda were to be fully implemented and the SDGs fully achieved, of necessity, there would be a dramatic reduction in global inequalities and inequalities within countries. Reducing them will result from a combination of more effective governance at multiple levels; increased development and climate finance flow to low-income countries as well as investment in, trade with and growth of those countries; and enhanced health, education and employment opportunities and social protection as well as fiscal measures aimed at mitigating domestic social exclusion, inequality and vulnerability.

Looking ahead to the coming few years, the international community, nation-states and other actors have an historic opportunity to accelerate progress on the three dimensions of sustainable development: to restore robust growth, eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities, and make substantial headway towards resolving the environmental crises we face. Seizing this opportunity will require major adjustments to the way societies produce, consume and share benefits and risks, but we cannot afford NOT to seize the opportunity. The well-being of both present and future generations hangs in the balance.

II. THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

The present analysis could not benefit from the findings of the not yet published 2022 edition of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals Report. Thus, a full picture of what has happened during year two of the pandemic vis-à-vis progress towards the SDGs is not yet available. [3] Nevertheless, pieces of the picture can be put together from various sources.

1). Overview of the pandemic's macroeconomic impacts

After a global contraction of 3.4 per cent in 2020 and following an expansion of 5.5 per cent in 2021,the highest rate of growth in more than four decades, the world economy is projected to grow by 4 per cent in 2022and 3.5 per cent in 2023. World gross product in 2021was1.9 per centhigher than in 2019 but still3.3 per cent below thelevel of output projected prior to the pandemic. [4]

Growth performance has varied across countries and regions. Developed economies experienced a much steeper GDP drop (4.8 per cent) than developing economies (1.6 per cent) in 2020, and also a slower recovery (4.8 per cent growth versus 6.4 per cent) in 2021. Projected 2022 GDP growth is 3.7 per cent for developed economies versus 4.5 per cent for developing economies. Least developed countries, on the other hand, while maintaining slight positive growth during 2020, grew substantially more slowly (1.4 per cent) than all developing economies in 2021, but that gap is projected nearly to close in 2022. [5]

[3] It should be noted that the data available for tracking progress on many SDGs indicators in many countries is a year or more out-of-date in any event.
[4] UN DESA, World Economic Situation and Prospects 2022.
[5] Ibid., Table I.1.

Latin America and the Caribbean, India, and Southern Africa experienced the steepest GDP decline in 2020, with Southern Africa recovering much more slowly than the others.

While too early to detect or to estimate its magnitude, there will likely be an adverse effect on future output from the impact COVID-19 has had on educational attainment. [6] Moreover, children and young adults in poorer countries are very likely more handicapped by disruptions to in-person education than those in wealthier countries.

Many low-income developing countries have experienced an increased risk of debt distress as a result of the pandemic's impact on GDP and critical foreign exchange earnings. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs' (UN DESA) 2022 World Economic Situation and Prospects [7] notes that, for more than half the countries in sub-Saharan Africa, debt-servicing costs account for a quarter of government revenue. About two-thirds of low- and lower-middle-income countries have cut education budgets since the onset of the pandemic [8] and UNICEF estimates the pandemic has also negatively impacted social spending on child protection, nutrition, and water and sanitation [9] (UNICEF, 2021).

In response to the growing debt distress, in May 2020 the Group of Twenty countries (G20) launched a Debt Service Suspension Initiative for bilateral creditors which has delivered more than $10.3 billion in relief to more than 40

[6] See, e.g., Fernald et al. (2021), Future Output Loss from COVID-Induced School Closures, FRBF Economic Letter, 16 February.
[7] UN DESA (2022), op. cit., p. 35.
[8] World Bank and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2021), Education Finance Watch 2021, 22 February.
[9] United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)(2021), COVID-19 and the Looming Debt Crisis, New York, April.

countries requesting it (out of a possible 73 eligible countries). [10] The debt suspension period lapsed at end-2021. [11] Given that the pandemic is far from over, and much of Africa remains unvaccinated, expiration at this time would seem premature.

Another concern going forward is accelerating inflation in many countries and the expected monetary authorities' response. Global headline inflation rose to an estimated 5.2 per cent in 2021, more than 2 per centage points above its trend rate in the past 10 years. [12] In particular, in the United States, where inflation is at levels last seen almost a half century ago, the Federal Reserve is expected to begin winding down its quantitative easing measures and raising interest rates. That will mean that dollar-denominated foreign debts will become more expensive to service, putting further pressure on heavily indebted countries.

2). Assessment of COVID-19's impacts on various SDGs

The impact of the pandemic on progress towards the SDGs has been wide-ranging. As well as the human suffering and the setbacks to progress on many fronts, there have also been displays across the globe of human resilience and innovative capacities in the face of adversity. In the preface to the 2021 Goalkeepers Report, Bill Gates and Melinda French Gates note that "people in every part of the world have been stepping up to protect the development progress we've made over decades—when it comes to the SDGs, at least, the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic could have been far worse." [13]

The 2021 Goalkeeper's report also provides data that can be considered while awaiting the SDG progress report.

[10] https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/debt/brief/covid-19-debt-service-suspension-initiative

[11] As of 17 February 2022, there is no indication of an extension.

[12] UN-DESA (2022), Global Economic Situation and Prospects 2022, p. VIII.

[13] https://www.gatesfoundation.org/goalkeepers/report/2021-report/

Loss of livelihood and income, combined in many cases with increased health costs, have forced millions (further) into poverty, setting back progress towards SDG 1. The 2021 Goalkeepers Report estimates that an additional 30 million people in developing countries have been forced into extreme poverty, the vast majority in Sub-Saharan Africa. [14] While men are almost one-quarter more likely to die of COVID-19 than women [15], the report notes that women are disproportionately affected by its economic and social impacts, notably reduced ability to participate in the labour market. In 2021, women's employment globally is expected to remain 13 million jobs below the 2019 level, while men's employment is expected to recover to pre-pandemic levels. [16]

There are a variety of reasons for women's labour market disadvantage, but disruptions to schooling and childcare provision rank high among them. Thus, the pandemic has simultaneously harmed female labour-force participation (SDG 8) and children's education (SDG 4) as well as their nutrition (SDG 2) to the extent that many millions of children around the world rely on school meals for adequate nutrition.

The move from in-person to digitally-enabled online learning has not only highlighted but exacerbated inequalities both within and between countries. [17] Families and children without quality Internet access have been at a serious learning disadvantage. Moreover, evidence to date suggests that underperforming students have suffered disproportionately from the interruption of in-person instruction. Students with poorly educated parents,

[14] Idem. Other estimates of additional people moving in extreme poverty are higher - from 65-75 million in 2021 (IMF, Fiscal Monitor Report, October 2021) to 119-124 million (UN SDG Progress Report 2021).
[15] Based on CDC data for United States deaths: https://data.cdc.gov/widgets/9bhg-hcku?mobile_redirect=true
[16] https://www.gatesfoundation.org/goalkeepers/report/2021-report/
[17] Cf. E. Dorn et al., "COVID-19 and education: The lingering effects of unfinished learning", McKinsey & Company, 27 July: https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/covid-19-and-education-the-lingering-effects-of-unfinished-learning

who are often essential workers having to leave the home for their jobs, and living in close quarters with multiple family members have generally faced greater challenges with online learning than children from smaller households with better-educated parents often working from home. More specifically, evidence for the United States finds that students in majority-Black schools are five months behind where they would otherwise have been without the pandemic, both in math and reading. Students in majority-White schools are now just two months behind historical levels. [18]

Just as women have been disadvantaged in employment, adolescent girls appear to have been disadvantaged in terms of returning to school once in-person learning resumed, especially adolescent girls from poor households in developing countries. [19] Economic duress, childcare responsibilities and early marriage have been among the contributing factors.

Urgent care for COVID-19 patients has interfered on occasion with other types of urgent medical care. The disruptions caused by the pandemic also interfered with mass vaccination programs, as suggested by data on administration of third doses of the Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis combination vaccine. [20] [21] A WHO and UNICEF assessment found that 23 million children missed out on basic childhood vaccines through routine

[18] McKinsey & Co., "COVID-19: Implications for Business", Executive Briefing, 15 December 2021: https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/risk-and-resilience/our-insights/covid-19-implications-for-business

[19] https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2021/09/22/what-do-we-know-about-the-effects-of-covid-19-on-girls-return-to-school/

[20] Goalkeepers Report 2021, Gates Foundation: https://www.gatesfoundation.org/goalkeepers/report/2021-report/data-sources/#ExploretheIndicatorPages.

[21] At the end of 2020, 35 out of 63 countries affected by humanitarian crises had at least one vaccine-preventable disease mass immunization campaign postponed due to COVID-19; OCHA, 22 Feb 2021: https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-humanitarian-response-plan-covid-19-progress-report-final-progress-report-22

health services in 2020, the highest number since 2009 and 3.7 million more than in 2019. [22] The World Health Organization and World Bank have recently assessed that the COVID-19 pandemic has severely set back decades of progress towards universal health coverage, imposing significant financial burdens on many people living in or near poverty. [23]

On the other hand, there have been success stories of continuing vital preventive health services in the midst of the pandemic. In 2020, the World Health Organization forecasted severe disruptions to essential malaria prevention efforts that could have set progress back 10 years — and resulted in an additional 200,000 deaths. That projection spurred many countries to action to ensure that bed nets were distributed and testing and antimalarial drugs remained available. For example, Benin, where malaria is the leading cause of death, innovated in the midst of the pandemic by creating a new, digitized distribution system for insecticide-treated bed nets, getting 7.6 million nets into homes across the country in just 20 days. [24]

COVID-19 has had marked effects on labour markets across the world. Of particular note is the stark difference in labour market outcomes between those workers able to shift to remote work and those whose work requires physical presence (including agriculture, food processing and manufacturing as well as leisure and hospitality, which was severely affected by the steep decline in travel, restaurant dining and in-person cultural events). Women make up a high proportion of those employed in the leisure and hospitality sector and thus were particularly hard hit.

[22] https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/covid-19-pandemic-leads-major-backsliding-childhood-vaccinations-new-who-unicef-data
[23] https://www.who.int/news/item/12-12-2021-more-than-half-a-billion-people-pushed-or-pushed-further-into-extreme-poverty-due-to-health-care-costs
[24] Goalkeepers Report 2021, p. 9.

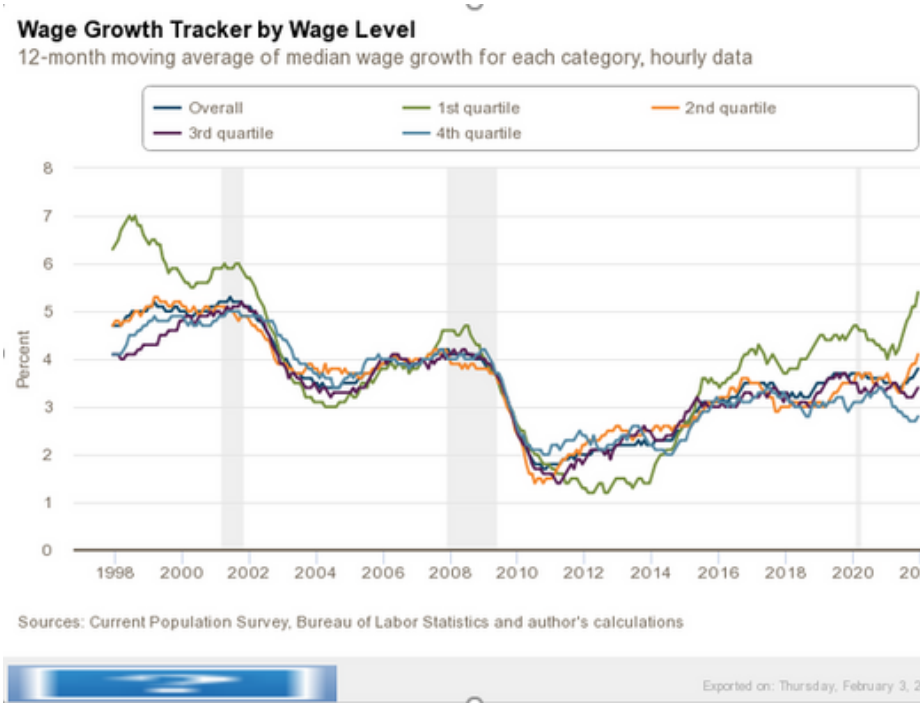
The wage impacts of COVID-19 are still playing themselves out, but one striking lesson of the pandemic is that many of the lowest-paid jobs in the economy are among the most essential in the midst of a pandemic - stocking grocery store shelves and checking out customers; delivering groceries and restaurant meals to people's homes; growing and processing meats, fruits and vegetables; making personal protective equipment, preparing meals for hospitals, nursing homes and other institutional care facilities, filling prescriptions at pharmacies; sanitizing hospitals, public transportation, and other facilities; operating buses and trains bringing health care and other essential workers to and from work; and many others. The high pandemic-related risk and stress of these professions would normally be rewarded by hazard pay and to some degree, this has happened. The longer-term question is whether there will be a more durable realignment of relative wages in different economies to reflect the changed appreciation of the value of different professions. The increased bargaining power of "front line workers" during the pandemic and changed evaluations of the trade-off between income and health risk have manifested in high quit rates (come to be known as 'the great resignation' [25]), difficulty on the part of employers to find workers as they scale back up, and many employers' having to offer higher wages as a result. (See Figure 1 for wage trends in the United States; workers in the lowest quintile of the wage distribution have seen the fast wage increases for several years, with a marked acceleration during the pandemic.) Of course, the risk of greater and greater job automation also looms.

COVID-19 has also had large impacts on the business sector, with particularly adverse effects on small- and medium-sized enterprises. A US study of small

[25] Economist Paul Krugman has also dubbed it the 'great retirement' as in the UK and USA at least withdrawal from employment has been especially marked among older workers (55-75 years); see also IMF blog: https://blogs.imf.org/2022/01/19/why-jobs-are-plentiful-while-workers-are-scarce/?campaign_id=116&emc=edit_pk_20220121&instance_id=50993&nl=paul-krugman&regi_id=23846288&segment_id=80428&te=1&user_id=865b527ce1812cc2fe3c00bdb7e76dcc

businesses early in the pandemic found that owners differed markedly in their expectations of its duration and this affected their likelihood of closure; also, many small businesses were financially precarious, with the median business with more than US$10,000 in monthly expenses having only two weeks' cash on hand. [26]

Figure 1. Median hourly wage growth by wage quintile in the United States [27]



26] Bartik et al. (2020), The impact of COVID-19 on small business outcomes and expectations, Science, 28 July: https://www.pnas.org/content/117/30/17656

[27] Reproduced from Paul Krugman, New York Times

(Small businesses are particularly prominent in service industries like restaurants and retail shops. Many adjusted their business models to rely on take-out service and contactless pick-up where possible. Such adjustments were survival tactics, and the degree to which different enterprises experienced business losses varies widely across countries (depending on the severity of the pandemic and the stringency and duration of the policy response) and also within any given country. A World Bank survey [28] found, for example, that in Senegal six retail firms with 10 employees reported, in the same week, a drop in sales ranging from 10 per cent to 100 per cent. Many firms benefited, where available, from government-provided liquidity or capital support. Approaches to business support differed across countries, from loans to cost compensation to flexible grants. [29] Only one in 10 companies in low-income countries surveyed by the World Bank has received some sort of public support, compared with half of all businesses in high-income countries. Moreover, large firms are almost twice as likely to receive support as micro firms. [30] Thus, as the pandemic stretched out, an untold number of businesses worldwide closed their doors long-term because they did not have adequate liquidity or access to capital to tide them over until demand recovered.

There are multiple other ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted progress towards the SDGs, but the overriding causal link is that between adverse economic impacts of the pandemic and the resources available to governments and others to continue to provide and afford a variety of essential goods and services. Lockdowns and social distancing measures have also interfered with various kinds of service provision, notably but not limited to the education sector.

[28] https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/02/17/tracking-an-unprecedented-year-for-businesses-everywhere

[29] For a comparison of small-business support policies across countries, see: https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/how-world-sought-protect-small-businesses-during-covid-19-crisis

[30] https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/02/17/tracking-an-unprecedented-year-for-businesses-everywhere

COVID-19 recovery measures will need to remediate inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic as, for example, with poor and disadvantaged students [31] falling further behind than others in learning outcomes – something which if not remedied will have a lifelong impact on income earnings potential. [32] Likewise, the disproportionate deaths of disadvantaged social and economic groups have highlighted the need to remedy the inequalities in access to preventive and other health care across the population.

COVID-19 provided a brief reprieve from some of the worst environmental problems, whether rising greenhouse gas emissions or dangerously dirty air in some major developing country cities. It was a two-edged sword, however, as the loss of wildlife tourism revenue in several African countries made it difficult to sustain game reserve services, including rangers for anti-poaching patrols, and reverse migration from cities to the countryside put new pressures on wildlife and rural environments. Also, there was a sharp contraction of global recycling efforts. Moreover, the second year of the pandemic (2021) has already seen a resumption of the upward trajectory of greenhouse gas emissions, with 2021 global emissions almost returning to the 2019 level. [33]

Meanwhile, while not linked to the pandemic, the impacts of climate change continue to unfold. A striking example relates to SDG 6 on water, with violent storms, torrential rains and flooding in certain places and severe droughts in others. History is no longer a guide to what to expect in the future: extreme weather events are happening more frequently than in the recorded past.

[31] US Department of Education research finds this includes students with disabilities; US Department of Education, Office for Human Rights, Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America's Students, June 2021.
[32] US experience suggests that having lagging students repeat grades can be counterproductive and that a better approach is to provide additional focused support ('targeted remediation') to struggling students to stay up with their pre-pandemic grade level. See e.g. discussion in A. North, 23 April 2021: https://www.vox.com/22380650/school-remote-distance-learning-pandemic-covid-19
[33] https://www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/charts/global-energy-related-co2-emissions-1990-2021

III. THE 2030 AGENDA AND SDGs: AN EESSENTIAL BLUEPRINT FOR EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY FROM COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a sharp if possibly temporary rupture to business as usual, to life as we knew it. This has come with huge costs, but recovery from the pandemic now presents an enormous opportunity - NOT to return to business as usual but instead to redress entrenched societal inequalities, bolster health and social protection system, promote inclusive growth and, tackle severe environmental crises like climate change and biodiversity loss and in so doing achieve environmental justice.

Seizing these will only be possible if governments and the international community take to heart the lessons which COVID has taught us - both about the likely contributing cause in humanity's transgressions against the natural world and about the deep-rooted inequalities in our societies which have translated into highly unequal disease and economic burdens from the pandemic.

The response to the pandemic over not just the near term but the medium and long term must get to grips with these social inequities and environmental depredations. Even as robust economic growth returns, we must seize the moment to ensure that it is both environmentally sustainable and socially equitable, and the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs provide an ideally suited framework for doing so, balancing action on the three dimensions of sustainable development. [34] If governments, the international community and all other stakeholders are to harden our resolve to achieve the SDGs and fully implement the 2030 Agenda, then we will need to build back from the pandemic in ways that are not merely incremental improvements on the pre-pandemic business as usual but break decisively from business as usual and honor the spirit of the 2030 Agenda to transform our world.

[34] According to the UN's 2021 Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report, "Several countries noted the importance of the alignment of policies and programmatic responses to the COVID-19crisis with the2030 Agenda, guided by the Agenda's central principle of LNOB [Leave No One Behind]" (p.71): https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/

1). **Moving from incrementalism to transformation: What will it take?**

The ambition of the 2030 Agenda is 'transforming our world', which suggests that should we achieve the SDGs and implement fully the agenda our world would be qualitatively different from the one in which we live today. This is apparent from the ambition of the 17 SDGs, which aim to close multiple gaps in human well-being and potential and to alter some of the most entrenched human behaviors - from consuming vast quantities of energy-intensive and waste-producing products and services to cutting down the world's forests at alarming rates to feed our consumption habits to depleting fisheries around the world. Japan's 2021 Voluntary National Review notes in this regard: "In order to realize a flexible and resilient socioeconomic structure in the Post COVID-19 era, with a virtuous cycle between the economy and the environment, it is necessary to promote changes in the behavior of society as a whole, involving all stakeholders, while holding up the SDGs as a compass …." [35]

Achieving the 2030 Agenda will be difficult, because the profound transformation of our societies and economies will be difficult. Ending entrenched inequalities within societies calls for broad political consensus that existing inequalities are unjustifiable on moral, political and/or economic grounds. Ending dependence on fossil fuels by means of a global energy transition calls for deep structural changes to whole economic sub-systems - from power generation to transport to heavy industry to building construction and maintenance to agriculture. [36] Human societies generally change slowly and powerful forces resist dramatic change. Social and economic stability are after all conducive to peace and prosperity. Also, even in societies where prosperity is far from equally shared, vested interests benefitting from the status quo often use their political influence to resist equalizing change (e.g., through more progressive taxation, increased social spending on the poor).

[35] Follow the following link to Japan's 2021 VNR (p. 11):
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/
[36] See S. Gross (2020), "Why are fossil fuels so hard to quit?", Brookings Institution, June:
https://www.brookings.edu/essay/why-are-fossil-fuels-so-hard-to-quit/

For instance, as income inequality has risen steeply in many countries over the past two decades, public support for income redistribution has also broadly increased [37], but redistributive policies have often been held in check by the political influence of wealthy individuals and corporations. Similarly, those invested heavily in current unsustainable systems - whether of food, energy, mobility or other - may well strongly resist system transformations. For the bulk of the population, habit, custom and inertia tend to favor the status quo, even if many of the adjustments needed for sustainable patterns of consumption would prove acceptable and even desirable once people are steered or nudged in that direction by offering a range of products and services that are more sustainable.

Where societies are well-ordered, peaceful, equitable, and living in harmony with nature, rapid and disruptive change may seem unjustified, even dangerous. The reality humanity faces today - and the reason for the 'universal' 2030 Agenda - is that no country on earth can check all the boxes: being home to a peaceful society where all people live prosperous lives in social harmony and in harmony with nature. Yes, we know that some countries - mostly in the far north - rate highly on various measures of 'sustainability' or 'sustainable development'. [38] We also know that (i) the people living in those countries are by no means satisfied that they cannot do better on issues like gender and other forms of economic and social equality for example; (ii) they cannot be what they are without depending on commerce and other interactions with other countries, and so their consumption and production choices have global consequences, some of which are clearly negative [39]; (iii) to varying degrees the people living there feel a moral obligation to help the poor and hungry living in less fortunate countries to free themselves from those scourges.

[37] IMF Working Paper (2014), Fiscal Policy and Income Inequality (S. Gupta and M. Keen), 23 January, Box 2 Figure.
[38] See for example the various indices of sustainability, sustainable development produced by think tanks and consultancies, beginning with SDSN's SDG Index which in 2021 ranks Finland, Sweden, and Denmark in top three positions; https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/rankings.
[39] SDSN (2021), Europe Sustainable Development Report 2021 notes: "Europe is the SDG leader globally, but generates negative international spillovers"; https://eu-dashboards.sdgindex.org/chapters/executive-summary

1.1 Towards greater equality within societies

The challenges in rectifying entrenched inequalities differ between countries with generous social welfare systems and those with more meager ones, between societies with very high measures of income and wealth inequality and those with significantly less unequal income and wealth distributions. Even in relatively equal societies, there are populations languishing in poverty or struggling economically. These may include indigenous communities, recent immigrants, persons with disabilities, racial/ethnic minorities, or people living in remote or otherwise geographically disadvantaged regions/localities. Children also experience high rates of poverty in many societies, which in turn contributes to the intergenerational transmission of poverty and inequality.

Significantly reducing inequalities where they are wide is a difficult undertaking, one very likely to generate political resistance, both ideological and self-interested. [40] In many democracies political parties representing different ideologies – including vis-à-vis the causes of, and the desirability of measures to mitigate, income and wealth inequality – control very nearly identical shares of votes in legislatures. This makes the passage of 'transformative' social policy legislation extremely challenging. It has been done historically in some countries (e.g., in the United States, the New Deal legislation of the 1930s, the 1960s 'war on poverty' legislation – including the Food Stamp Act and the Social Security Act – and, more recently, the 2010 Affordable Care Act; in India, the 2005 Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act). [41] Brazil's Bolsa Familia was done through executive action, building upon and consolidating several pre-existing social protection programmes. [42]

[40] For an extensive discussion in the US context, see the Peterson Institute for International Economics' "How to Fix Economic Inequality": https://www.piie.com/microsites/how-fix-economic-inequality
[41] https://nrega.nic.in/Nregahome/MGNREGA_new/Nrega_home.aspx
[42] https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/bolsa-familia-in-brazil

The importance of government policy (in particular taxes and transfers) to observed income inequality is well-demonstrated by Figure 2.A. Were it not for such policy, income inequality in all advanced economies would be significantly greater than it is. Even so, the effects of policy on inequality vary widely across developed countries, as does before-tax/transfer inequality. Moreover, the progressiveness of tax/transfer policies has been diminishing in a number of these countries, contributing to widening measured inequality over time (Figure 2.B).

The urgency of policy change in the spirit of reducing within-country inequalities (as per SDG 10) is especially great in those developed countries (and developing countries in a similar situation) where inequality was already wide in the past (in the figure here, the mid-1980s) and has widened significantly since.

It may also be the case, as in a number of developing countries, that fiscal policies are regressive, with the burden falling more heavily on the lower rungs than on the top of the income distribution. [43] This may be because: (i) the bulk of tax revenue is derived from indirect taxes on consumption, to which the poor devote a higher share of their income; and (ii) a large share of fiscal transfers consist of subsidies notably to energy, from which the higher earners tend to benefit disproportionately. Hence the need in such cases for fiscal reforms towards greater reliance on direct taxes and on subsidy reform with a view to more targeted transfers to the poor and lower-income households.

Figure 2.C. shows inequality trends (measured by changes in the Gini index) for a number of developing countries having data points from both the mid-1980s and the recent past. It would appear that a higher proportion of

[43] Cf. chapter by N. Lustig et al. (2019) in Kharas et al., Leave No One Behind: Time for Specifics on the Sustainable Development Goals, Brookings Institution Press, pp. 169-208.

developing countries than developed countries have experienced a narrowing of inequalities over this period. Moreover, in a few countries (Tunisia, Thailand, Lesotho for example), the reduction in inequality by this measure has been quite marked. On the other hand, a few countries (Costa Rica, Indonesia, Sri Lanka) have witnessed significant increases in inequality, albeit from relatively low levels in the latter two.

Figure 2.A: Gini coefficient before and after taxes and transfers for high-income countries, 2018 or latest year

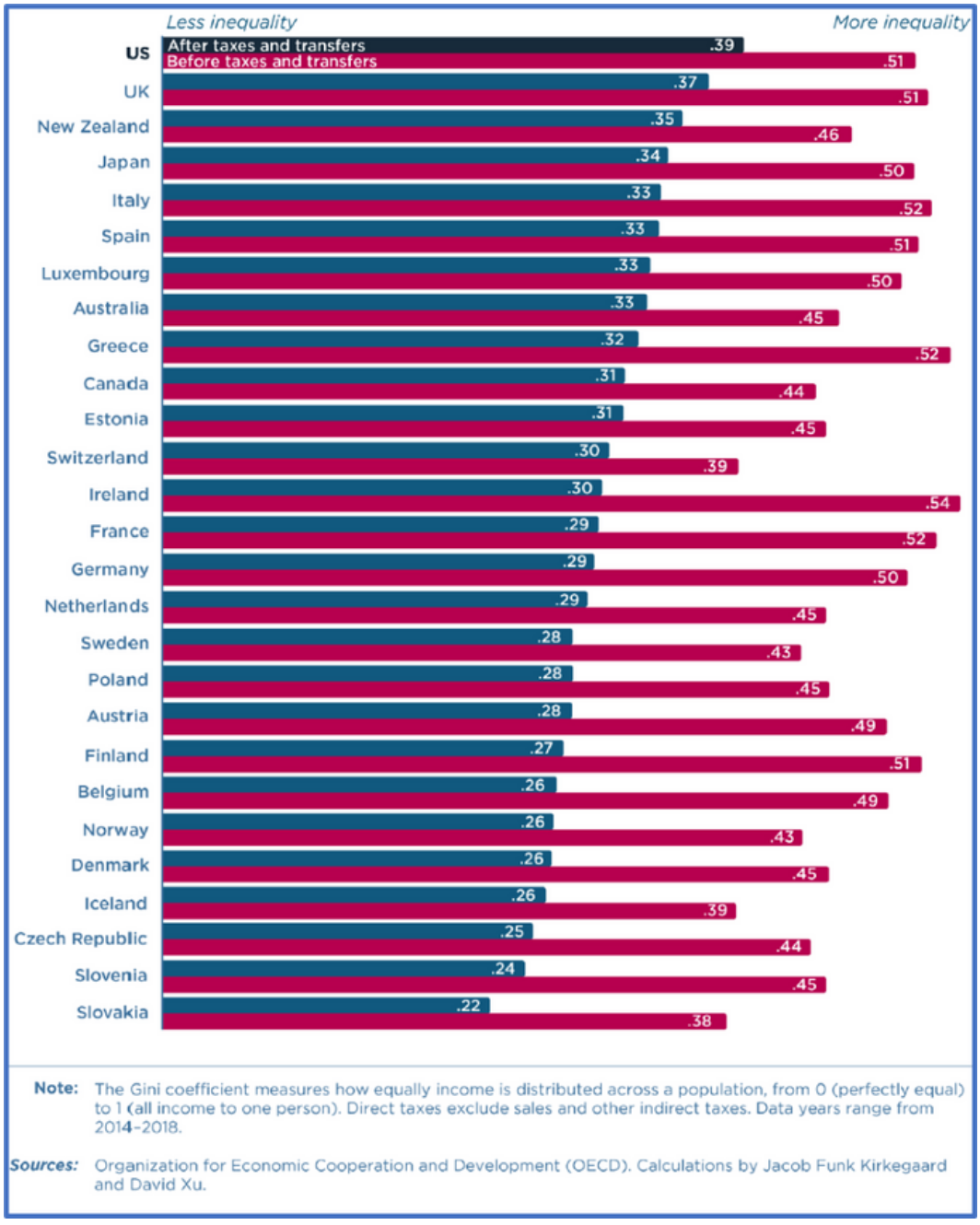
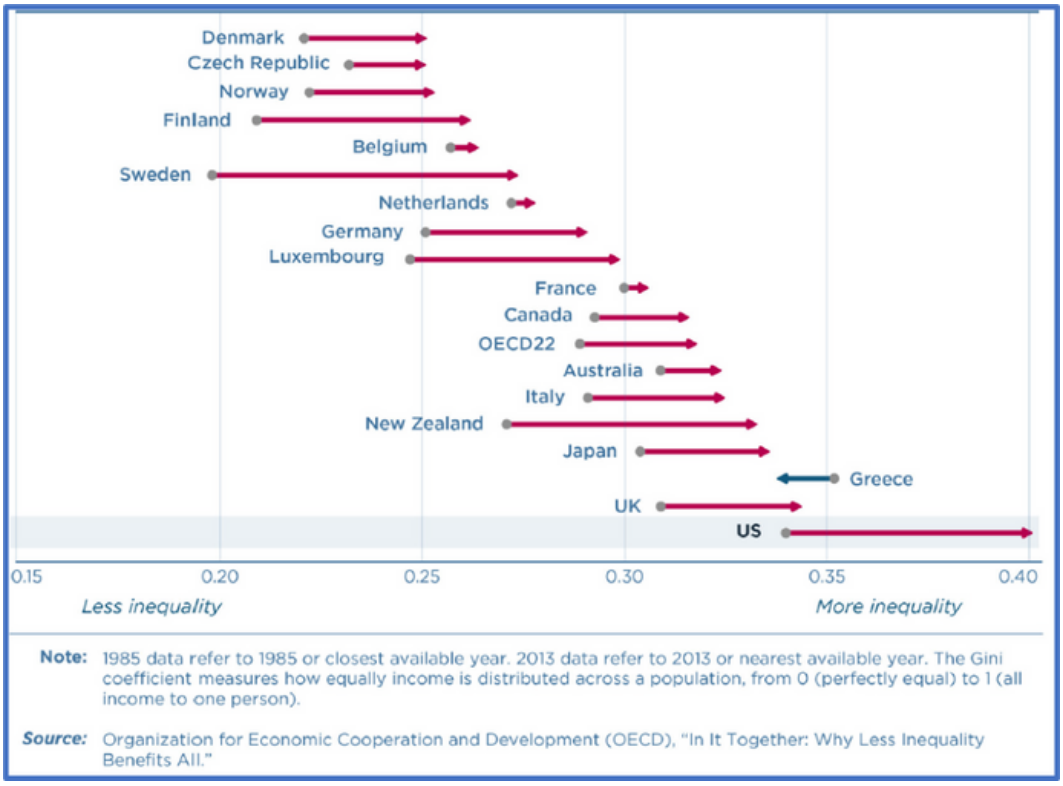


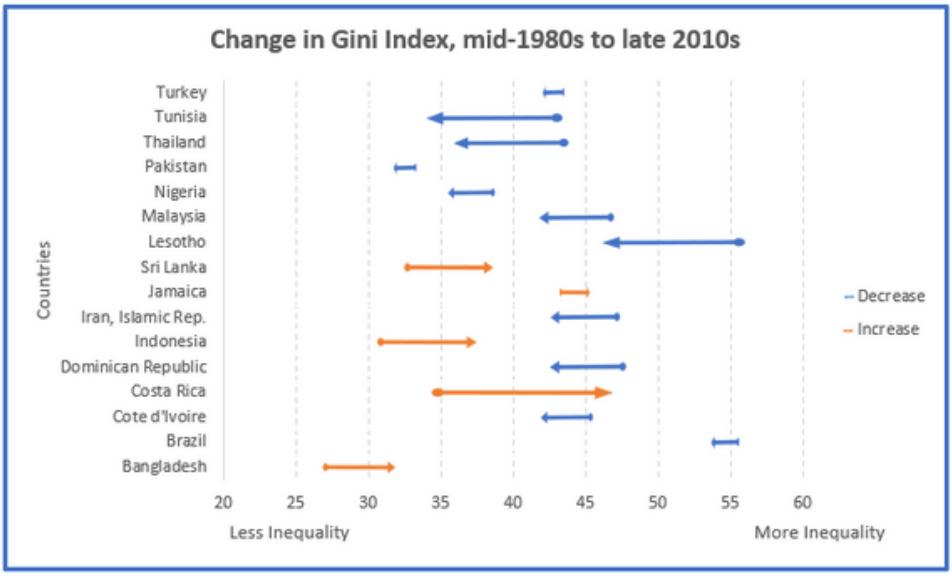
Figure 2.B: Change in Gini coefficient 1985 to 2013



Note: 1985 data refer to 1985 or closest available year. 2013 data refer to 2013 or nearest available year. The Gini coefficient measures how equally income is distributed across a population, from 0 (perfectly equal) to 1 (all income to one person).

Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "In It Together: Why Less Inequality Benefits All."

Figure 2.C: Change in Gini Index, mid-1980s to late 2010s



Source: World Bank database.

Note: The World Bank metadata glossary (https://databank.worldbank.org/metadataglossary/gender-statistics/series/SI.POV.GINI#:~:text=Gini%20index%20measures%20the%20extent,from%20a%20perfectly%20equal%20distribution) does not make clear whether the income on which the Gini is calculated is before or after taxes and transfers, but it is assumed it is after.

1.2 Transformation towards sustainable consumption and production

The transformations needed in each society will be different, including in countries at different levels of development. Thus, for example, developed and emerging countries face the challenge of decarbonizing existing, well-developed energy systems, while for low-income developing countries the challenge is one of extending energy access to all based on building low- or zero-carbon energy systems largely from scratch. Both are essential, both difficult. Yet, with the advance of globalization, national systems are often interlinked in global systems - whether the fossil fuel economy, the industrial food system, or multiple other global supply chains. For instance, SDSN (2021) [44] observes, based on the calculation of its "international spillover index," that "CO_2 emissions emitted abroad to satisfy EU consumption (so-called imported CO_2 emissions) increased by around 3.5% in 2018, a faster rate than GDP. EU food supply chains also generate substantial negative impacts, in terms of [biodiversity - sic] threats to biodiversity and land use in the rest of the world". These interdependencies call for globally coordinated action - not just through markets and supply chains, which are an important piece of the puzzle but left on their own will simply not work fast enough. There is a need for a big push from coordinated multilateral commitments by governments - to phasing out coal power plant construction and decommissioning existing coal-fired power plants, to curtailing methane emissions, to ending deforestation, to offering their citizenry sustainable consumption choices, etc. - backed up by adequate financial and other resources.

Changes to individual behavior will need to be a crucial part of the equation, especially if (as some argue [45]) it is unlikely that breakthrough technologies

[44] SDSN (2021), op. cit.

[45] See UK FIRES report on Absolute Zero by J.M. Allwood et al.: https://ukfires.org/absolute-zero/, in particular the 'Key Messages for Individuals'.

(like carbon capture/removal and storage) will be ready to be deployed on a large scale before mid-century. With or without these technologies, major behavioral changes will be needed to move to a net-zero world - including massive shifts in transport towards public transport and electric vehicles, temperature regulation in buildings, and diets (away from red meat consumption in many societies towards greater reliance on plant-based protein).

Given the importance of individual behavioral change, how rapidly have important changes happened in the past? Is there reason for optimism? Also, is it possible that such behavioral changes could accelerate in the age of social media and widespread online information about the ethical consequences of one's consumption choices, not to mention the impact of demographics, with the coming of age of young people educated to varying degrees about sustainability, climate change and social justice? Taking the three major shifts flagged above, transport is the one easiest to transform, as public policy and investment can have major impacts on consumer choices and preferences - e.g., investing in clean, efficient, safe and convenient public transport; building out electric vehicle charging networks; regulating vehicle carbon emissions; mandating the phase-out of internal combustion vehicles; subsidizing electric vehicle purchases to incentivize rapid uptake. As for building energy efficiency, once more government policy (incentives, regulations) can play an important role in inducing insulation and/or other upgrades. Diets may be the most challenging to change through government policy. That said, the variation in per capita beef and veal consumption is huge across countries, even at similar levels of development: e.g., Japan's 15.4 pounds to the USA's 57.2 pounds in the most recent year. [46] There is thus substantial scope for reducing red meat consumption in high-consumption countries without adverse health effects (Japan's overall life expectancy is six years higher than that of the United States), assuming

[46] https://data.oecd.org/agroutput/meat-consumption.htm

cultural preferences and/or economics change sufficiently. [47] Innovation in food processing and preparation holds potential as meat substitutes increasingly mimic the qualities (notably taste and texture) of the meats for which they substitute.

1.3 Summing up

There is a need for policy changes and/or greater policy ambition across a number of areas, from inequalities to climate change, if governments and the international community are to achieve the SDGs and implement the 2030 Agenda. The question for examination at the upcoming High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is what it will take to induce the needed changes and increased ambition. The 2030 Agenda and SDGs do not seem on their own to provide sufficient impetus. Whether the Paris Agreement does remains an open question. The Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda (discussed below) calls for multilateral agreement on strengthened global governance for protecting the global commons and supplying global public goods. [48] What specifically would such new global governance arrangements entail?

[47] US beef consumption has fallen since the mid-1970s, and periods of greatest decline have been associated with economic shocks – the oil price shock of the 1970s and the financial crisis of the 2000s. For example, after reaching a level of 66.4 lb. per capita in 2006, U.S. meat and veal consumption fell to 54.1 lb. per capita in 2015 before rising again towards 57.2 lb. Idem.
[48] While not necessarily a criticism, the proposals contained in OCA for "strengthened" global governance generally consist of one-off high-level events, periodic joint meetings (e.g., of G20, ECOSOC, WB and IMF), and various commissions and reports. There are not many suggestions for substantially reformed or strengthened existing governance institutions and or new arrangements, with a few exceptions (like a global emergency platform, …).

2). The rationale for strengthening synergies and addressing tradeoffs across different goals

Some would have liked to see 10 goals, others maybe 15. "Prioritize" was the familiar mantra. Governments eventually agreed to 17. To suggest that so many goals imply a lack of priorities misses the point. The 2030 Agenda both affirms and challenges the accustomed priorities of the past. Yes, poverty eradication remains priority number one, and meeting basic human needs and strengthening human capabilities are critically important goals. And yes, achieving these is greatly facilitated by inclusive and sustainable economic growth (SDGs 8, 9). Yet, we have been rudely reminded - by the abrupt shock of the pandemic as well as the slower-moving climate and biodiversity crises - that human beings cannot thrive in a world of nature and climate disruption. Moreover, the pandemic has starkly highlighted the way that pre-existing entrenched inequalities contributed to dramatically different disease burdens and economic hardships for different echelons of the income distribution and segments of society. Also, the response to the pandemic has differed markedly between the richer countries with ready access to vaccines and the fiscal space to cushion economic shocks and the poor countries lacking both a ready supply of vaccines and fiscal space.

In short, it is now abundantly clear that, as countries strive to build back from COVID-19, we must mitigate the inequalities among countries as well as within countries (as called for in SDG 10 but requiring progress on multiple other SDGs - 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 9 for example) and reorient humanity's relationship with the natural world and climate system (notably by achieving SDGs 6, 13, 14 and 15).. In short, the 2030 Agenda founded on the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) represents the best hope we have for tackling humanity's most urgent challenges.

Achieving the SDGs and implementing the 2030 Agenda in their breadth of ambition requires that we recognize and address the multiple interlinkages among goals and targets - for example between consumption in one country and production in another; between progress on energy access and progress on climate change; among health, education and economic inequalities; between human well-being and a healthy environment and stable climate. Some have referred to this integrated view as 'systems' thinking to differentiate it from our accustomed more 'siloed' way of thinking and acting, with macroeconomics here, health there, education somewhere else, the environment in still another silo. As two Moldovan commentators observe: "In complex systems, the uncoordinated actions of actors would result in suboptimal outcomes for the whole systems." [49]

One good example of such 'systems' thinking applied to planning for SDG implementation is provided by Weitz et al. (2019). [50] They illustrate how to map connections among a subset of targets (to be selected through a consultative multi-stakeholder process) and then rate the influences of progress towards one on the achievement of others. Looking at both direct and indirect (through intermediate target) influences, one can identify which targets have strong and/or multiple positive synergies - where progress towards one triggers progress towards others. This information can then inform priority setting and resource allocation. In its third Voluntary National Review (VNR) in 2021, Sierra Leone mentions that it now prioritizes certain SDGs as "accelerator Goals" [51] that could advance multiple agendas and address COVID-19 recovery, including SDG 4 and SDG 16, which are thought to have the highest potential for socio-economic transformation. [52]

[49] A. Moraru and V. Prohnitchi (2018), https://unsdg.un.org/latest/blog/untangling-complexity-sustainable-development-goals-moldova

[50] N. Weitz et al. (2019), "SDG Synergies: An approach for coherent 2030 Agenda implementation", Stockholm Environment Institute, Brief, May.

[51] This concept is presumably inspired by UNDP's "SDG accelerator" framework and toolkit (see below).

[52] UN's 2021 Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report, p. 35; https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/

COVID-19 has starkly highlighted interdependencies among areas of policy concern addressed by the SDGs and their targets. For instance, the prior existence of inequalities across social groups (in income and job opportunities, nutritional status, access to health care and education) has translated into differential vulnerability to serious illness and death from COVID-19 (highlighting the interdependencies among SDGs 2, 3, 4, 8 and 10). Thus, going forward, and assessing the shortcomings of the COVID-19 response, governments and other stakeholders should not just be strengthening pandemic readiness and response but tackling those factors which systematically contributed to worse disease outcomes for some people than others, the so-called 'social determinants of health'. This is imperative if we are to remain true to the Agenda 2030's commitment to "leave no one behind".

The pandemic has highlighted other interdependencies, not least between global human health (SDG 3) and the health of economies (SDG 8), with the pandemic causing massive macroeconomic contractions (as noted above) and disruptions of whole economic sectors, in particular, various service industries. [53] The pandemic has also shed light on the links between SDG 3 and the state of the natural world (SDGs 14 and 15). While zoonotic diseases transmitted from other animal species to humans have become more common in recent decades, nothing before can compare in global severity to the COVID-19 pandemic from the Sars-Cov-2 virus (likely to have zoonotic origins). [54]

Like tackling climate change, redefining and reshaping humanity's relationship with other species and the natural environment takes concerted and sustained effort. As with climate change, continued loss of biodiversity and healthy

[53] For example, international tourism receipt losses are estimated to have amounted to US$ 1.1 trillion over the pandemic to date; UN-DESA (2021), World Economic Situation and Prospects 2021, p. xii.

[54] Pertaining to zoonosis: a disease that can be transmitted from animals to people or, more specifically, a disease that normally exists in animals but that can infect humans.

ecosystems will make humanity poorer and unhealthier - materially but also spiritually. Hence, the strong connection that needs to be forged in stoking economic recovery, in building back better, between nature's health, economic health, and human health and well-being.

3). The link with other relevant processes, in particular, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda

The 2030 timeframe for the 2030 Agenda, while inspired to a large degree by the 15-year horizon of the Millennium Development Goals (meant to be achieved by 2015), also aligns closely with the timeframe that climate scientists tell us provides our last chance to bend steeply downward the global greenhouse gas emissions curve if we are to have a reasonable chance of keeping global mean temperature rise (above pre-industrial levels) to 1.5 degrees Celsius or less over this century.

2030 is a medium-term timeframe that can inform public and private action today, but it is now less than a decade hence. It is an ambitious timeframe both for achieving all of the SDGs including for getting to grips with decarbonizing the global economy. Ambition is both necessary and good. If we fail to achieve these two sets of ambitious goals, we will be abdicating our responsibility to both our children and all future generations, as forcefully stated by the Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda. [55]

The overriding challenge will be to ensure that the near-term costs of transformation and the medium- to long-term benefits are fairly shared and that the poor and vulnerable are not left behind. This is the essence of what the 2030 Agenda aims to achieve.

[55] Secretary-General, United Nations (2021), Our Common Agenda, p. 43: https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf

The 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement are twins born a few months apart and inseparable. Understood in its entirety, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a broad consensus framework for governments and societies to move ahead on a path that offers the best chance of reconciling decarbonization and climate adaptation with sustained improvements in human well-being for all peoples. On the other side, if humanity cannot slow and then halt global mean temperature rise and its consequences for economies and societies, there is little if any hope of achieving the rest of the 2030 Agenda. Poverty and hunger eradication by 2030: not likely in a rapidly warming world of worsening droughts and crop failures; peaceful societies: likewise ever more difficult to achieve and sustain as conflicts threaten over increasingly scarce water and other essentials of human existence.

More positively, tackling climate change through building zero-carbon energy systems and economies over the coming decades offers humanity the best opportunity to achieve shared prosperity for all. Economic transformations on the scale needed will open up huge new employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. The younger generations stand especially to benefit. Older workers in declining industries will need social protection, but dynamic economies built on new sustainable industries and technologies should be able to provide such protection.

The Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda states: "The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals are at the core of Our Common Agenda. The 2030 Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet, prosperity and peace, that seeks to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality". [56] The Secretary-General calls in Our Common Agenda for strengthened international cooperation, including effective arrangements to deliver:

[56] Ibid., p. 18: https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf

... a set of vital common goals on which our welfare, and indeed survival, as a human race depend. Notably, we need to improve the protection of the global commons and the provision of a broader set of global public goods, those issues that benefit humanity as a whole and that cannot be managed by any one State or actor alone. Many of these objectives (the "what") are set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations. I believe that it is high time for Member States, together with other relevant stakeholders, to devise strategies for achieving them (the "how"), through enhanced multilateral governance of global commons and global public goods. [57]

IV. AN OVERVIEW OF POLICIES AND MEASURES TO RECOVER BETTER FROM COVID-19, INCLUDING ACTIONS IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL AREAS: STOPGAP OR STRATEGIC?

In an opinion piece in the New York Times reflecting on what it takes to follow through on new year's resolutions, Ann-Marie Slaughter writes: "Changing systems requires a strategic plan". [58] The above quote from the UN Secretary-General suggests likewise.

The UN's 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR 2019) purports to offer "a general plan of action" for effecting the transformations envisaged in the 2030 Agenda, structured around four levers and six entry

[57] Ibid., pp. 17-18: https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf
[58] A.-M. Slaughter, "Resolve to Think Bigger in 2022", New York Times, 3 January 2022: https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/03/opinion/new-years-resolutions.html.

points for transformation. [59] [60] The GSDR appeals to international organizations and governments as follows: "Multilateral organizations, governments and public authorities should explicitly adopt the Sustainable Development Goals as a guiding framework for their programming, planning and budgetary procedures. To accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, they should devote special attention to directing resources – including finances, official development assistance at levels that meet international commitments, and technologies – to the six entry points, applying knowledge of the interlinkages across Goals and targets, contributing to the realization of co-benefits and resolving trade-offs." [61]

Many governments and private actors are rallying around plans and policies to guide public and private resource allocation decisions in a "climate-friendly" direction. While such efforts are critical, they will falter if they do not adequately connect the dots between "climate-friendly" and "people-friendly" actions and investments. The 2030 Agenda provides valuable guidance to be able to connect those dots.

[59] The four levers are: Governance, Economy and finance, Individual and collective action, and Science and technology. The six entry points are: Human well-being and capabilities, Sustainable and just economies, Food systems and nutrition patterns, Energy decarbonization and universal access, Urban and peri-urban development, and Global environmental commons; United Nations (2019), Global Sustainable Development Report: follow link to 2nd printing at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/gsdr2019.

[60] This is not the only way one can cut the SDG cake into more bite-sized pieces which retain coherence and foster a systemic approach. IIASA (2018), for example, as part of its 'The World in 2050' initiative, identifies a somewhat different set of six transformations based on what are identified as 'megatrends': Human capacity and demography, Consumption and production, Decarbonization and energy, Food, biosphere and water, Smart cities, and Digital revolution. See IIASA (2018), TWI2050 Report: Transformations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals: https://iiasa.ac.at/web/home/research/twi/Report2018.html.

[61] Ibid., p. xxxii; https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/gsdr2019.

1). Policies and investments by national governments

Beginning soon after the pandemic hit the world in early 2020, governments adopted COVID-19 response measures, including stimulus measures to cushion its social and economic impacts. The sums globally are enormous, including in the largest economies - the United States, China, the EU area and Japan. The IMF provides a COVID-19 response tracker by country, last updated in July 2021, which includes both fiscal and monetary responses by country (and area/group in case of EU and some others). [62] For the most part, these measures were conceived as temporary crisis response measures, but the pandemic has come on top of slower-moving and longer-term challenges, even crises, notably, entrenched and in many countries rising inequalities, and accelerating climate change. The response to the pandemic has afforded governments an opportunity to take bold actions to tackle these long-term challenges, but they have so far varied greatly in their willingness and courage to seize this opportunity. Insofar as evidence to date permits, we aim to shed light on how far crisis-response measures have paved the way for bold, transformative actions advancing progress towards the SDGs including tackling inequalities, climate change and biodiversity loss.

1.1 Crisis response measures

Authorities around the world utilized a combination of fiscal and monetary policies to cushion the shocks to their economies from the pandemic, including widespread shutdown of activities, income losses and social and economic (food, housing, health) insecurities.

[62] https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19

1.2 Fiscal response measures

The biggest fiscal stimulus has been implemented in the United States, amounting to roughly 13 per cent of GDP in both 2020 and 2021. The support is directed at the public health response, including vaccine research, production and distribution, support to state and local governments and to K-12 schools, and time-bound assistance to families and businesses. [63]

China announced discretionary fiscal measures amounting to RMB 4.9 trillion (equivalent to US$784 billion), or 4.7 per cent of GDP, of which roughly 85 per cent were implemented in 2020. [64] A variety of off-budget support measures are estimated to add stimulus of roughly 2 per cent of GDP.

Soon after the onset of the pandemic, the European Union agreed to enhance temporarily the flexibility of state aid rules to permit support of national efforts to shore up critically affected economic sectors. Then, towards the end of 2020, it adopted the NextGenerationEU (NGEU) package estimated at €750 billion (US$848 billion), disbursed roughly as half grants/half loans, and financed by borrowing at the EU level. The package includes safety-net measures to finance health-related spending, a job-protection loan programme, loan guarantees to the European Investment Bank to support companies in financial distress, with a focus on small- and medium-sized enterprises, and likely extension to end-2022 of the general escape clause in the EU fiscal rules.

[63] Idem.
[64] Idem.

Beyond EU spending, a number of EU member states have also spent large shares of their GDPs on COVID response measures, including Germany, Italy and France. Japan has also spent more than half its GDP on COVID response and the United Kingdom 18 per cent.

India's fiscal measures amounted to roughly US$300 billion equivalent, or almost 10 per cent of GDP, with support in the early stages of the pandemic focused on social protection and health care, followed later by support to various production sectors. In April 2021, the central government announced it would provide free foodgrains to 800 million people, following up on a similar programme which expired at end-2020. Japan meanwhile allocated almost US$1 trillion to an emergency stimulus package in April 2020, a similar amount in May 2020, followed in December 2020 by an additional US$650 billion.

Several other countries around the world have, to varying degrees, provided fiscal stimulus to support their economies and social protection to their citizens during the pandemic. [65] Other countries where such measures represent a sizeable share of GDP include Australia and Canada (around 20 per cent of GDP), Argentina and Brazil (12 per cent of GDP), and Indonesia and Turkey (8.5 and 8.0 per cent, respectively). [66]

The capacity to provide such support varies with the fiscal position of a government and the space to mobilize public resources for this purpose. Heavily indebted countries have been particularly challenged (though government borrowing has increased steeply during the pandemic), as have countries whose GDPs are highly specialized in sectors which were most adversely impacted by the pandemic, like tourism.

[65] Consult IMF inventory for individual countries' experiences:
[66] Statistica.com data: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1107572/covid-19-value-g20-stimulus-packages-share-gdp/

Services trade fell by 20 per cent in 2020, largely driven by travel and tourism, compared to an 8 per cent drop in merchandise trade. [67]

(See below for discussion of the role of international financial institutions like the IMF in supporting these countries.)

1.3 Monetary policy response measures

Central banks around the world implemented a variety of measures to inject liquidity into their economies and ensure financial stability. For example, China, Indonesia, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates lowered bank reserve requirements; Argentina, Brazil, Sri Lanka, Taiwan Province of China and the United Kingdom launched or expanded special credit facilities for small and medium-sized enterprises; Brazil, Mexico, the Republic of Korea and Singapore established temporary United States dollar swap lines with the Federal Reserve; Hong Kong SAR, Norway, South Africa and the United Kingdom relaxed macroprudential regulations—suspending countercyclical capital or liquidity buffers—to enhance credit flows. [68]

The monetary authorities of the United States, European Union and Japan mounted especially large programs of direct asset purchases, or quantitative easing, which had been initiated first on a large scale following the 2008 financial crisis (see Table 1).

[67] World Trade Organization, World Trade Statistical Review 2021: https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/wts2021_e/wts21_toc_e.htm
[68] UN-DESA, World Economic Situation and Prospects 2021, January, p. 20.

Table 1. [69]

Asset purchases by major central banks

Central Bank	Asset purchases between March–November 2020 (billions of US dollars)
United States Federal Reserve	3,021
European Central Bank	3,028
Bank of Japan	1,405

Sources: United States Federal Reserve Board, European Central Bank and Bank of Japan.

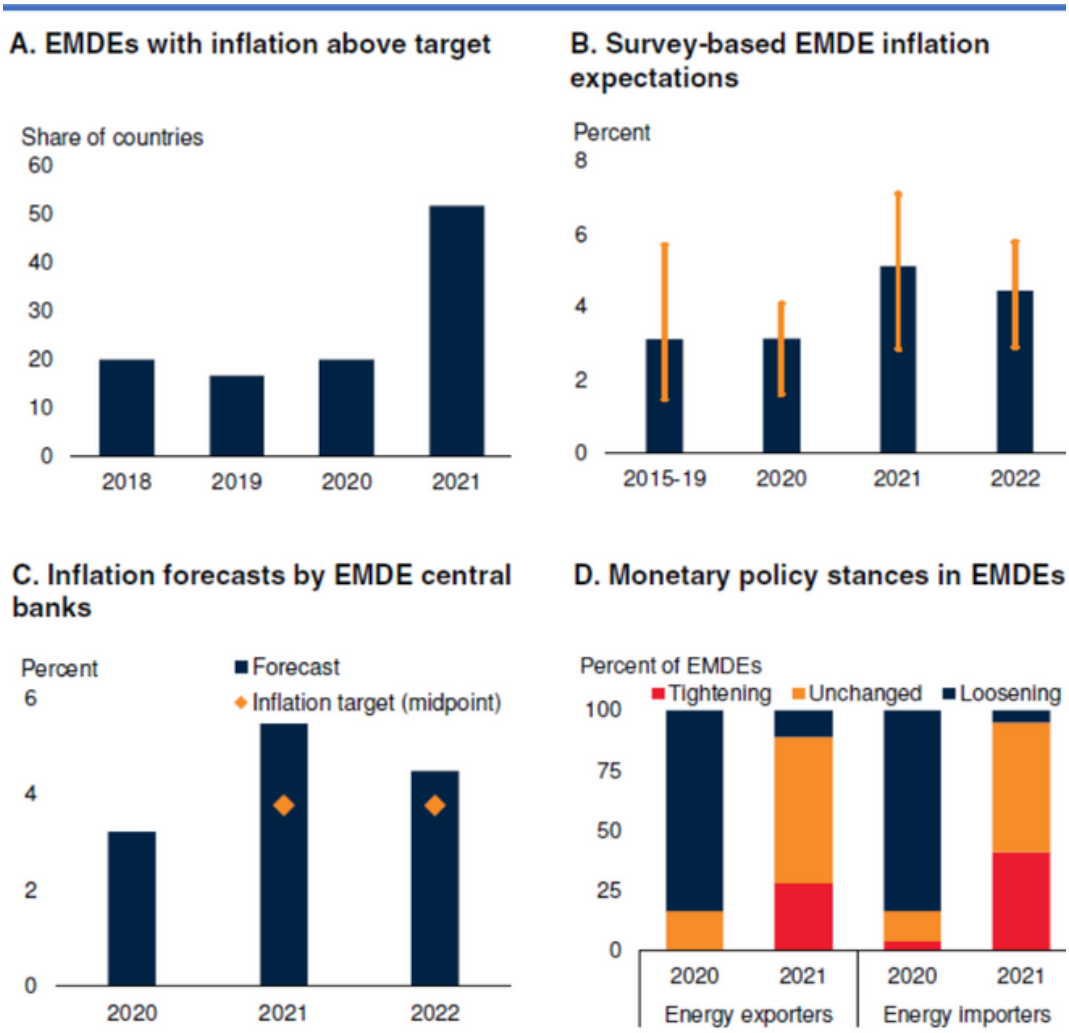
With the 2021 acceleration of inflation in the United States and other major economies, central banks (the US Federal Reserve in particular) are planning to unwind their quantitative easing and are expected to begin to raise interest rates in an effort to dampen upward price pressures.

Accelerating inflation is also a problem in emerging market and developing economies (EMDE – World Bank category; see Figure 3) and, in addition to monetary tightening in their own economies, they may face adverse spillovers from monetary tightening in advanced economies in the form of capital outflows and higher international borrowing costs. [70] The latest geopolitical tensions in Europe are also likely to exacerbate inflationary pressures in energy and food markets. The latter is particularly worrisome as food insecurity has already been on the rise in many countries during the pandemic.

[69] Ibid., p. 21.

[70] World Bank, Global Economic Prospects 2022, January, Washington, D.C. See also UN-DESA, World Economic Situation and Prospects 2022, p. VIII.

Figure 3. Inflation in emerging markets and developing economies [71]



Sources: Central bank websites; Consensus Economics; Haver Analytics; World Bank.

Note: EMDEs = emerging market and developing economies.

A. Figure shows share of inflation-targeting EMDEs that experienced inflation above the target range for each year. 2021 inflation is based on average of January-October 2021.

B. Figure shows median headline 2021-22 CPI inflation expectations for 48 EMDEs derived from the December 2021 *Consensus Economics* survey. Data for 2015-20 indicate actual inflation rates. Orange whiskers indicate interquartile ranges.

C. Figure shows median headline 2021-22 CPI inflation forecasts by 13 EMDE central banks as of December 2021. Data for 2020 indicate actual inflation rates. Orange diamonds indicate inflation targets (midpoint). Sample includes Brazil, Chile, Colombia, the Arab Republic of Egypt, India, Mexico, Philippines, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Thailand, and Turkey.

D. Figure shows share of countries that experienced a policy rate hike (tightening monetary policy rate) and cut (loosening monetary policy rate). Data for 2021 are through December 15, 2021. Sample includes 74 EMDEs.

[71] Taken from World Bank (2022), op. cit., p. 34.

A 2020 Policy Brief of UN-DESA enumerates a number of the emergency response measures taken by governments who presented their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the 2020 High-level Political Forum (HLPF). As the Brief notes: in some cases with support from the World Bank, IMF, WHO or UNICEF, governments "created emergency assistance programmes and emergency response funds for employers and employees so as to support sustainable and continuing economic development and provide macroeconomic stability…". This involved supporting individual economic entities in countries' priority sectors to address the liquidity-related risks expected due to the spread of COVID-19. Measures also included providing assistance in refinancing personal and business loans, including student loans, lowering taxes for some sectors, providing interest rate subsidies, supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and providing lump-sum grants to preserve jobs. [72]

1.4 Building back better

Beyond the immediate COVID-19 crisis response measures, which by design are meant to be temporary, many countries are also investing in longer-term "post-COVID" rebuilding, some involving structural transformation (so-called "building back better"). Such investments are aimed at deep-rooted challenges, like fossil fuel dependence and structural inequalities, and designed to modernize economies to take advantage of the digital technologies of the future. It seems likely that, in some countries where small

[72] Countries who mentioned one or more of these measures include: Argentina, Armenia, Brunei Darussalam, Costa Rica, India, Micronesia, Moldova, Morocco, Nigeria, Panama, Russian Federation. See UN/DESA Policy Brief #85, Impact of COVID-19: perspective from Voluntary National Reviews, 14 Sept.; https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-85-impact-of-covid-19-perspective-from-voluntary-national-reviews/

government is perceived as a virtue, these investments' large scale is only politically feasible because the response to the COVID-19 pandemic has accustomed people to the idea that large-scale government interventions can promote the public interest.

Among the largest such packages are these:

- In the United States, substantial additional investments are expected in physical infrastructure (the US$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) and in social and climate measures (up to US$1.75 trillion) in the event of passage of an additional spending bill sometime in 2022;

- The EU's long-term budget, coupled with NextGenerationEU, will be the largest stimulus package ever financed in Europe, an estimated €2.018 trillion (US$2.28 trillion) at current prices. [73]

These investments are spread over several years - up to a decade - and so the macroeconomic impact in a given year will be significantly less than for the COVID response measures enumerated above. Still, these public investments and policy measures are important in shaping the direction of economies through the critical decade ahead, when countries must deliver major cuts in greenhouse gas emissions while working to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. For example, the climate-related measures in the second US package above will go some way to redirecting the transportation sector towards electric vehicles. A number of the social policy measures (e.g., the child tax credit, health insurance subsidies for certain low-income populations) would likely contribute to reducing income inequalities and childhood poverty.

[73] https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en

The EU's NextGenerationEU has the objective to move the EU member States along a green path towards net-zero carbon emissions by mid-century. In addition, it will include investments in digital access and educational and employment opportunities for young people and for disadvantaged groups. [74] As noted above, NextGenerationEU consists of a €750bn recovery package for the entire Union, with the €672.5bn Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) as its central element. The RRF is to be accessed based on Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs) prepared by national governments, with at least 37 per cent of those Plans supporting the green transition, with the remainder of the funding doing no harm. [75]

Beyond the United States and EU, several national governments view COVID-19 recovery as an opportunity to move their economies in a more sustainable direction (see Box A below). Thus, for example, Denmark states (in its 2021 Voluntary National Review): "The foundation of Denmark's Recovery and Resilience Plan is to utilize the need to stimulate the economy to support and frontload investments in the green transition. While the funds will help stimulate the economy and support jobs and companies in the short run, they will also contribute to speeding up the green transition in the medium to long run." [76] Indonesia, in concluding its 2021 VNR, notes that recovery from COVID-19 presents "the perfect opportunity for transformation or radical change, namely, recovery of industry, tourism and investment towards a green economy, reform of national health system, reform of social protection system, and reform of disaster resilience system". [77]

[74] https://europa.eu/next-generation-eu/index_en
[75] As described in the Green Recovery Tracker of the Wuppertal Institute and E3G: https://www.greenrecoverytracker.org/
[76] Government of Denmark (2021): https://en.fm.dk/news/news/2021/juni/denmark-releases-its-second-voluntary-national-review-ahead-of-the-un-s-sdg-follow-up/
[77] See Indonesia's VNR at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/

Bhutan, in its 2021 VNR, notes that it is "drawing important lessons from the pandemic—including the need and possibilities for long-term, transformative and green solutions for its food system, local economy, public services delivery, approaches to learning, data ecosystem, and preparedness for disasters and future pandemics." [78] Similarly, Canada's Budget 2021: A Recovery Plan for Jobs, Growth, and Resilience proposes to provide C$17.6 billion (US$14 billion) towards a green recovery that will fight climate change, reduce pollution, invest in world-leading clean technology, protect nature, and create decent middle-class jobs. [79]

The Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action notes in a recent report that, with the pandemic, the emerging market and developing economies experienced a sharper reduction in investment as a share of GDP than developed countries, and that investment rates in the former group have been slow to recover. They thus argue for an investment-led recovery, noting that, for emerging market and developing economies, "recovery investments in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis are a unique opportunity to accelerate the transition towards emissions neutrality and, more broadly, to build the foundations for sustainable and inclusive growth. Green investments will make more-ambitious climate policy easier, both politically and technically." [80]

[78] See Bhutan's VNR at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/
[79] https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2021/04/government-of-canada-highlights-budget-2021-investments-to-create-a-healthy-environment-for-a-healthy-economy.html
[80] Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action, Building Momentum for a Strong Recovery and Sustainable Transformation An update to the Better Recovery, Better World — November 2021 Report.

To the extent possible, based on early available evidence, section 5 will provide an assessment of how far ambitious policy pronouncements about building back better and transforming economies towards sustainable and inclusive development are translating into visible and measurable progress on the ground.

Box A: Snapshot of Countries' 'Build Back Better' Initiatives in Recovery Plans

Bhutan: for ensuring quality and inclusiveness of social outcomes, health and education flagship programmes are under implementation. National policies on gender equality, disabilities, and mother and child health have been endorsed. Flagship programmes on sustainable tourism, organic agriculture, cottage and small industries, drinking and irrigation water, waste management, and digital transformation are being implemented to enhance productive capacity of the economy.

Denmark: recovery plan allocates funds for the agreements on green road transport, green tax reform, and the Government's digitalization partnership. Sixty per cent of funds will be used for the "green transition" aspired to by EU member States.

Germany: "At the national, European and international levels, policies and programmes in response to the COVID 19 crisis must be aligned with the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs and guided at all times by the Agenda's principle of leaving no one behind."

Indonesia: "To ensure a sustainable and resilient recovery, Indonesia is undertaking systematic reforms in four sectors, namely social protection system, national health system, disaster resilience system, and recovery of industry, tourism, and investment towards the green economy, supported by low-carbon development."

Sierra Leone: Its Quick Action Economic Recovery Programme has five key pillars designed to stem COVID-19's socioeconomic effects: a) supply of essential commodities; b) maintenance of local food production; c) continued operations of critical small and medium enterprise; d) prioritizing vulnerable populations through social protection; and e) supporting labor-intensive public works, notably to generate youth employment.

Uruguay: The legislature created a COVID-19 Solidarity Fund to manage and track funding of the pandemic response, including a variety of social protection measures, loan guarantees for companies, and targeted support to heavily affected sectors like tourism, culture and recreation. Regarding building back better, the government is committed to "integrating environmental aims and climate change mitigation and adaptation actions into its economic policy decisions. For that purpose, it is aimed that the economic recovery is consistent with a path towards less greenhouse gas emissions and a climate-resilient economy". The VNR further notes: "... achieving the necessary transformation to attain sustainable development will require the consistent participation of the financial system, as well as of corporate business models driven by consumers and markets in line with the SDGs." In this regard, "it is necessary to consolidate a sustainable financial market, a path Uruguay has started to tread."

Sources: 2020 or 2021 Voluntary National Reviews of these countries, found at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/

2). Actions by international organizations

As national and local governments have had to respond in crisis mode to the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, so have international institutions charged with supporting the sustainable social and economic development of developing countries. International financial institutions and regional development banks have gone to extraordinary lengths to mobilize emergency funding for the COVID-19 response. How far can the COVID-19 response of these institutions be expected to reinforce their support to SDG attainment over the medium term?

2.1 Supporting crisis response in vulnerable countries

National and local governments with the fiscal capacity, as well as the European Union, have been at the forefront of the COVID-19 response, but for many developing countries limited fiscal capacity has hampered their response on a scale sufficient to avoid major social and economic disruptions.

International financial institutions and regional banks have mobilized resources for emergency response. For example, the World Bank Group has deployed over US$157 billion through June 2021 to fight the health, economic, and social impacts of the pandemic. [81] The financing is helping more than 100 countries strengthen pandemic preparedness, protect the poor and jobs, and jump-start a climate-friendly recovery. [82]

[81] https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/climate-support-facility/green-recovery-initiative
[82] https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/06/15/world-bank-imf-launch-high-level-advisory-group-on-sustainable-and-inclusive-recovery-and-growth

Even before the pandemic, many low- and middle-income developing countries were heavily indebted. With the onset of COVID-19 and economic closures, the capacity of many to service that debt was severely strained. The G20 countries responded immediately with a 'debt service suspension' initiative in April 2020, which has since been extended. Meanwhile, the IMF has put in place various crisis response facilities and instruments, and IMF members have agreed to a special US$650 billion allocation of Special Drawing Rights, with countries in a strong external position encouraged to channel their additional SDRs into the IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust. As of end-July 2021, the PRGT had mobilized loan resources amounting to SDR 16.9 billion (US$12 billion) for low-income countries. [83]

The IMF has called for the urgent reform of the international debt architecture in the face of a more complex creditor landscape with new official creditors and new forms of lending. [84] The 2022 United Nations Financing for Development Forum will examine in depth the challenges facing heavily-indebted countries and possible response measures of the international community.

A recent assessment of sovereign borrowing [85] during the first year of the pandemic finds that relatively little of the funds were used for medium- to long-term investments, even less for green investments. In many cases, rescue funds provided to specific industries entrenched existing structures and practices rather than using conditionalities and incentives to drive sustainable investments and behaviors. Moreover, sovereign borrowers

[83] https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Policy-Papers/Issues/2021/07/29/Poverty-Reduction-and-Growth-Trust2020-21-Borrowing-Agreements-with-The-Government-of-463063
[84] See https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/11/16/vc111620-current-sovereign-debt-challenges-and-priorities-in-the-period-ahead
[85] Dibley et al. (2021), National COVID debts: climate change imperils countries' ability to repay, Nature, 592, 8 April, pp. 184-187.

rarely evaluated exposure to future climate risk as part of their borrowing, despite the likelihood in many countries that over the term of the borrowing such risk will increase. The authors argue for an early introduction of such risk evaluation, to avoid sudden and large repricing of debt in the future, but also point to the development of green sovereign bonds which incentivize investing in climate resilience and nature-performance bonds whose cost of debt repayment is linked with performance on nature-related and/or climate-related indicators. [86]

2.2 Towards support to 2030 Agenda implementation

Beyond addressing the financial and other needs precipitated by the pandemic, international institutions were already engaged to varying degrees and in accordance with their respective mandates in supporting countries' progress on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, implementation of the 2030 Agenda happens in the real world, which is in the midst of a global health crisis. In a sense, we are undergoing a test of whether the 2030 Agenda holds up as a guidepost showing the way forward for a world in crisis.

Following is a brief (non-exhaustive) review of the work of a number of key international organizations in support of the 2030 Agenda.

In 2019 the IMF produced a review of its work in support of the 2030 Agenda. [87] It noted among its accomplishments an increased level of support to strengthening countries' tax systems to foster domestic resource mobilization; an increased emphasis on inclusion in its policy and its surveillance work, including a focus on inequality, gender and financial inclusion; increased

[86] Ibid., p. 187.
[87] https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Policy-Papers/Issues/2019/06/03/Review-of-Implementation-of-IMF-Commitments-in-Support-of-the-2030-Agenda-for-Sustainable-46960

technical support to help countries to deepen their financial markets; support to improved debt management and public infrastructure management; and intensified engagement in fragile and conflict-affected countries with a view to promoting macroeconomic stability and building core state capacities.

The World Bank has produced several knowledge products oriented towards the SDGs and 2030 Agenda, including its SDGs Atlas which contains a useful exposition of the targets under SDG 10 - reducing inequalities. [88] In late 2020, it announced its intention to ensure that on average 35 per cent of its financing over the next five years has climate "co-benefits". [89]

Moreover, In the context of the World Bank Group's financial support to help countries and private sector clients respond to the public health and socio-economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has launched its Green Recovery Initiative (GRI) which aims to use its ongoing policy dialogue with countries to advance reforms and investments required to promote a sustainable recovery. [90] More specifically in relation to climate change, the GRI supports countries to: (i) prevent the rollback of existing climate-related efforts; (ii) include climate-smart investments in recovery and stimulus packages; and (iii) explore opportunities for resilience, emission reductions and, where possible, decarbonization in economic recovery efforts. [91]

[88] https://datatopics.worldbank.org/sdgatlas/goal-10-reduced-inequalities/
[89] https://datatopics.worldbank.org/sdgatlas/goal-10-reduced-inequalities/
[90] https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/climate-support-facility/green-recovery-initiative
[91] Idem.

The World Bank and IMF have jointly constituted a High-level Advisory Group on Sustainable and Inclusive Recovery and Growth. Headed by leading economists from the World Bank, IMF and London School of Economics, its work is expected to continue through end-2022 in two phases focused, first, on accelerating and scaling up investments and creating the enabling conditions for recovery and, second, on deepening the agenda for sustained transformation that is "green, resilient and inclusive". [92] The HLAG is supposed to produce targeted policy briefs to inform various high-level processes, like the G7, G20, World Bank Group-IMF Annual Meetings, and the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action (see abovementioned report).

In 2020, the World Bank Group and IMF joined with other multilateral/regional development banks to produce a report on their contributions to financing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs as well as providing technical assistance, policy support and knowledge. [93] The report contains a number of examples of projects supported by the MDBs, highlighting the SDG each principally advances (see Box B for an example from the African Development Bank).

The World Trade Organization (WTO) has played an important role in advancing progress on certain dimensions of the 2030 Agenda. As noted in a special report, "Trade and the WTO have contributed significantly to the unprecedented economic development that has taken place in the last decade and a half. For example, trade has allowed many developing countries to benefit from the opportunities created by emerging new markets, to integrate into the world market through global value chains at lower costs and to reap the rewards from higher world commodity prices."

[92] https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/what-we-do/brief/high-level-advisory-group-on-sustainable-and-inclusive-recovery-and-growth
[93] https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/financing-sustainable-development-goals-contributions-multilateral-development-banks

The report continues: “Trade contributes to the realization of the SDGs and, as an enabler, serves as a foundation from which to build national, regional and international policies for sustainable development.” [94] [95]

Box B. Multilateral Development Bank Support to the 2030 Agenda and SDGs

AfDB launched the Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa Program in 2018, which aims to close the gender credit gap for women in Africa and scale up support for women's enterprises by mobilizing $5 billion in investment by 2025. Direct AfDB financing of $138 million will be on-lent to women through 10 financial institutions in Botswana, Guinea, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Senegal, and Tunisia. In March 2020, an initial portfolio credit guarantee transaction of $250 million was approved, which will unlock $1.3 billion–$2.0 billion, alongside the Africa Guarantee Fund, which will provide up to $70 million to unlock $93 million in financing for 11,000 women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Accompanying technical assistance and policy dialogue is intended to enhance the enabling environment and remove legal barriers to businesses owned and run by women. In 2018, the program provided technical assistance to several banks, and partnered with the Entreprenarium Foundation to train 1,000 women entrepreneurs across the continent in business model development and financial planning.

Source: https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/financing-sustainable-development-goals-contributions-multilateral-development-banks

[94] World Trade Organization (2018), Mainstreaming trade to attain the Sustainable Development Goals, Geneva, p.9.

[95] At the same time, the rapid expansion of world trade has brought a deterioration of the global environment in different dimensions – from rising shipping-related greenhouse gas emissions to deforestation and biodiversity loss from expansion of export cash crop production, neither of which is currently adequately addressed by the WTO or other international institutions.

The United Nations system response is led by the WHO with the UN Crisis Management Team (UNCMT) implementing a UN system-wide coordination process comprised of 23 UN entities working together to implement three distinct but complementary strategies: a strengthened health response focused around the Updated COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan; a humanitarian response led by UN Office of the High Commissioner on Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA), focused on 56 countries with humanitarian needs; a transformative and sustainable recovery grounded in the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, led by the UN Sustainable Development Group. [96]

The consolidated UN status report on the COVID-19 response notes that UN Country Teams "have been advancing vaccine equity and the rollout of vaccines in 145 countries through the COVAX facility with the leadership of WHO and UNICEF, and reinforcing the socioeconomic response and recovery efforts led by the Resident Coordinators with the technical lead of UNDP, as a bridge to accelerate SDG implementation."

The UN status report goes on to report that "United Nations socioeconomic response plans have been prepared, covering 139 countries and territories to support the provision of essential services, strengthen social protection services, protect jobs and vulnerable workers and maintain social cohesion. They align to SDG trajectories and include a focus on a green recovery, digitalization and inclusion." [97] To facilitate monitoring of progress with the UN COVID-19 response, a data portal has been created reporting on a set of 18 disaggregated indicators. [98]

[96] https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/UN-response
[97] Ibid., p. 30.
98] https://data.uninfo.org/Home/_SERP

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), a key actor in the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, plays a lead role in supporting national governments with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and attainment of the SDGs, using a variety of tools offered as part of its SDG Accelerator toolkit. [99] The tools are grouped into three main bundles – integration tools, leave no one behind tools, and risk-informed development tools, which include measures for climate change adaptation as well as pandemic preparedness and response and peace and conflict analysis.

3). Actions taken by other stakeholders (private sector, philanthropies, NGOs)

The pandemic has required an all-of-society response, as it has affected people in many aspects of their lives across the globe. The public health institutions of governments at multiple levels have been critical to shaping the effectiveness of pandemic response, as has the capacity of health care systems more generally. Each country does well to undertake a critical examination of its health sector and pandemic preparedness in the aftermath of the pandemic, but at present, the sector is still responding in crisis mode in most countries.

In its 2020 VNR, Zambia describes how COVID-19 stressed its health-care system and led it to take a number of measures to improve preparedness for future disease outbreaks by focusing on: (i) diseases surveillance, (ii) testing and other diagnostics, (iii) building community awareness, (iv) personal protective equipment, and (v) case management and treatment. [100]

[99] https://sdgintegration.undp.org/sdg-acceleration-toolkit
[100] Zambia Voluntary National Review 2020, cited in UN-DESA Policy Brief #85, Impact of COVID-19: perspective from Voluntary National Reviews, 14 September: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-85-impact-of-covid-19-perspective-from-voluntary-national-reviews/

At the international level, in 2020 the WHO convened a High-level Panel on Pandemic Preparedness and Response, headed by Helen Clark and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, which presented its report to the 74th World Health Assembly in May 2021. [101] Among the report's messages are the following:

Zoonotic outbreaks are becoming more frequent, increasing the urgency for better detection and more robust preparedness. Given the increasing stakes, monitoring pandemic threat needs to be on the agenda of decision-makers at the highest levels of governmental, intergovernmental, corporate and community organizations.

Pandemic preparedness planning is a core function of governments and of the international system and must be overseen at the highest level. It is not a responsibility of the health sector alone. [102]

Beyond the health response, different societal institutions have been challenged to respond to the pandemic in their respective areas of responsibility – from educational institutions having to adapt rapidly to online education, to corporations having to adapt to remote working on a large scale, to businesses reliant on physical presence having to put in place measures to protect workers from infection by the virus. Initially, ignorance about the virus and how to control its spread and treat it was universal, with a very steep learning curve measured in human lives lost.

Responses have been hugely different and more or less effective across institutions and countries. Millions of workers have been exposed to the virus on the job, exposed others in their households and fallen ill, with many dying. Businesses in many countries were caught flat-footed, unable quickly to supply the extraordinary surge in demand for personal protective equipment not only for health care workers but for the general public.

[101] High-Level Panel (2021), COVID-19: Making it the Last Pandemic: https://theindependentpanel.org/about-the-independent-panel/
[102] Ibid., p. 20.

Ventilators were in extremely short supply and supplies of medical oxygen were quickly depleted in a number of countries. The private sector mounted a response, supported and pressured at times by governments. Scientific research went into high gear in both the public and private sectors, including at research universities and institutes, on vaccines as well as on therapeutics.

The response to the pandemic continues to evolve but it has become abundantly clear that, despite the emergence of several variants of the COVID-19 virus, the vaccines successfully developed remain a critical weapon in the arsenal to combat serious illness and death. Still, global access remains highly uneven, and expeditious global COVID-19 vaccination is the urgent need of the moment. At present, while 65 per cent or more of the population has received at least one vaccine dose in developed countries and many emerging economies, in almost all of Africa the share is 35 per cent or less and in many countries below 20 per cent. [103]

Given the differences across the globe in the way pharmaceutical research is conducted and its successful results made available to those in need and, given the significant costs of manufacturing and distributing sufficient quantities of vaccines, there remains a challenge in ensuring that vaccines are produced and distributed across the globe in a timely manner. COVAX was established early on to serve as a vehicle for equitable global vaccine distribution. As of January 2022, COVAX had shipped one billion vaccine doses to 144 countries; it has secured 2.8 billion doses from funded agreements and confirmed donations. [104] [105]

After attending to the vaccination needs of their own populations, developed countries and others with sizeable vaccine production have raised their level of support for global vaccine distribution. As vaccine supply and donations

[103] New York Times COVID-19 vaccination tracker:
https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/covid-vaccinations-tracker.html
[104] https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/covax-vaccine-supply-outstrips-demand-first-time-2022-02-23/
[105] https://www.unicef.org/supply/covid-19-vaccine-market-dashboard

have ramped up, however, low-income countries are facing hurdles such as gaps in cold-chain shortage, vaccine hesitancy and a lack of money to support distribution networks. [106]

3.1 Private sector response

The main vaccines being distributed globally are manufactured by private companies, even though much of the scientific research underlying their development was supported by governments and even conducted in/with government laboratories.

This has provided governments with considerable leverage, should they choose to use it, to require companies to distribute their vaccines widely at low cost and even to share their intellectual property and production know-how to enable the vaccines to be produced by other manufacturers. The WHO has created a COVID-19 Technology Access Pool which aims among other things to enable sharing of intellectual property. [107]

Some companies have formed partnerships to accelerate vaccine production and distribution as, for example, AstraZeneca's partnership with the Serum Institute of India to manufacture its vaccine. The latter has also reached an agreement to manufacture for India and other low and middle-income countries the Novavax vaccine, and it is also producing the Russian-developed Sputnik V vaccine. Both Moderna and Pfizer rely on contract manufacturing organizations to augment their vaccine production capacity. Moderna has also announced plans to invest up to $500 million in a state-of-the-art facility in Africa to produce messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines to combat COVID-19.

[106] https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/covax-vaccine-supply-outstrips-demand-first-time-2022-02-23/
[107] https://www.who.int/initiatives/covid-19-technology-access-pool

Rwanda, Senegal and South Africa are being considered as possible locations. [108] In mid-2021, in partnership with France and Germany, the U.S. government announced a US$530 million investment enabling the South African firm Aspen Pharmacare Holdings Ltd. to produce the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. [109]

Chinese vaccines are manufactured in China and sold and donated around the world (about 1.3 billion to date going to a total of 115 countries, with more than half going to Asia-Pacific countries). [110] So far, Chinese vaccine producers partner with local partners only for the 'fill-and-finish' processes of manufacturing the vaccines, though there remains the future possibility of further technology transfer. [111]

Looking ahead, it is important that the international community, national governments and pharmaceutical manufacturers draw lessons from the limited availability of effective vaccines for much of the developing world two years into the pandemic to prepare for strategically expanding vaccine production capabilities (including for mRNA vaccines) around the world. How best to ensure the world is not caught flatfooted again, and that vaccine equity is ensured as a matter of course and not constrained by 'vaccine nationalism'?

Recently, the WHO Director-General has announced a partnership involving a South African biotechnology company and other South African, regional and global partners to create a vaccine production capability on the African continent. The mRNA vaccine hub, he notes, will be "a partnership between WHO, Afrigen Biologics, the Biologicals and Vaccines Institute of Southern Africa, or Biovac, the South African Medical Research Council, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Medicines Patent Pool."

[108] https://it.usembassy.gov/expanding-covid-19-vaccine-production-in-africa/
[109] Idem.
[110] https://bridgebeijing.com/our-publications/our-publications-1/china-covid-19-vaccines-tracker/#China8217s_Vaccines_Around_the_World
[111] Idem.

This choice was based on Afrigen's announcement that it has produced its own mRNA vaccine, based on publicly available information about the composition of an existing (the Moderna) vaccine. It is expected, moreover, that the mRNA technology can be extended beyond the prevention of serious illness from COVID to other diseases like malaria, TB and HIV. [112] [113]

Beyond the pharmaceutical industry, other public and private companies have had to respond to the pandemic, in an effort to remain solvent, to protect their workforces, and to contribute to the broader societal imperative to bring the pandemic under control. They have had to do so with varying degrees of guidance from governments and in societies and local communities frequently riven by divisions over whether vaccines should be mandated or not.

3.2 Philanthropies

In countries with traditions of philanthropy and/or high-net-worth individuals, philanthropies have contributed in important ways to the COVID-19 response. [114] Few foundations have the resources to make a large-scale impact; even the resources of the Gates Foundation pale by comparison with those of the US government or large US corporations. Thus, philanthropies normally act more as catalysts to promote risky, innovative and socially beneficial ventures in line with their missions.

Among the largest global foundations, a number are oriented as least in part to medical research and development, and several have contributed to the COVID-19 pandemic response in their own countries and globally. These include:

[112] Remarks at mRNA Technology Transfer Hub in South Africa, 11 February 2022.
[113] One possible model for distributing vaccine production capacities globally is provided by Fu et al. (2021), The world has a unique opportunity: Accelerating technology transfer and vaccine production through partnerships, Journal of International Business Policy.
[114] See this site for links to philanthropies (mostly US-based) highly rated for their COVID-19 response work: https://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=content.view&cpid=7779#group-470

The Novo Nordisk Foundation, the largest in the world, has contributed hundreds of millions of Danish Kroners (tens of millions of US dollars) to support the fight against COVID-19 [115], including for:

- Test centers throughout Denmark;
- Emergency production of ethanol for hand sanitizer and disinfectant (in cooperation with the Carlsberg Foundation);
- Trials of anti-inflammatory drugs for the treatment of COVID-19 (in collaboration with Rigshospitalet, the largest hospital in Denmark).

The Gates Foundation has supported vaccine development and distribution in developing countries for many years, augmenting its vaccine support in response to COVID-19 as well as funding development and evaluation of COVID-19 therapeutics and contributing to the WHO budget. [116]

- From 2016 to 2020, the Foundation contributed US$1.55 billion to GAVI, being the number two contributor, then pledging an additional $1.6 billion in June 2020 for the subsequent five years;
- In 2020, together with the UK research charity Wellcome and Mastercard, the Gates Foundation set up the COVID-19 Therapeutics Accelerator to hasten the development and evaluation of new and repurposed drugs and biologics to treat patients for COVID-19;
- When the WHO appealed for additional funding in 2020, the Gates Foundation pledged an extra US$150 million on top of the US$100 million committed earlier.

[115] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novo_Nordisk_Foundation#COVID-19_pandemic
[116] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_%26_Melinda_Gates_Foundation#Global_health_division

The Azim Premji Foundation [117] has worked together with Wipro, the company established by its namesake, to provide support to the COVID-19 response in India, including:

- 10,000 oxygenated beds and 1,000 ICU beds;
- 100 testing centers with 80,000 per day capacity;
- support for 45 "public-spirited" hospitals serving vulnerable populations

roughly $260 million in financial support including to vaccine distribution across the country.

There are hundreds if not thousands of other philanthropic foundations across the world providing support to pandemic response, including vital support of community-based organizations and NGOs that have been instrumental in ensuring food security and providing other forms of social welfare and humanitarian support to those hardest hit by the pandemic and its social and economic fallout.

3.3 NGO including humanitarian pandemic response

The universe of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is very large and it is not possible to make broad generalizations about how they have mobilized and contributed to the COVID-19 response. Some are very large, but even their resources for a large-scale public health response pale by comparison with governments'. Thus, they often serve instead to identify and fill critical gaps in the social safety net as well as to foster social innovation.

Coalitions or networks of NGOs are useful aggregators of information on the NGO response, and InterAction is one such network with mostly US-based members, whose website links to its members' COVID-19 response. [118] A comparable European network is Concord, which consists of 2,600.

[117] https://azimpremjifoundation.org/Covid-19
[118] https://www.interaction.org/blog/ngos-respond-to-covid-19-interaction-member-snapshot/ (last updated on 8 March 2021).

NGOs. [119] One snapshot of COVID-related NGO work is provided in Box C.

Box C. Jhpiego Efforts to Support COVID-19 Vaccine Readiness, Introduction, and Scale-Up

Working in Africa and Asia, Jhpiego is a Johns Hopkins university affiliated NGO with several decades' experience whose 2020 Annual Report states: "From the very start of the pandemic, our goal has been twofold: to prevent, detect and respond to outbreaks while maintaining the high-quality health care services required for all women, men and families to grow and thrive."

Specifically, Jhpiego has supported ministries of health in a number of countries, including Nigeria and Pakistan, to prepare for the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine. It has also provided support to the Government of Afghanistan in its planning for surveillance of the immunization programme and monitoring of adverse events following immunization. It is also coordinating with the South Africa National and Provincial Departments of Health to ensure that each vaccination site has sufficient vaccinators and that all vaccinators have orientations and access to expert advice by implementing training and developing supportive supervision structures. In Kenya, Jhpiego addresses vaccine hesitancy using artificial intelligence methods to tap social media insights, identifying key influencers to creatively address hesitancy in targeted communities to reach a critical mass of vaccine coverage.

Source: https://www.interaction.org/blog/ngos-respond-to-covid-19-interaction-member-snapshot/ and https://www.jhpiego.org/2020-annual-report/

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Development Initiatives have tracked international humanitarian assistance in response to the pandemic, reporting in April 2021 that in 2020 a total of US$6.6 billion in humanitarian grants were made, a substantial increase from 2019 though still falling far short of the estimated needs. [120] Of that, US$3.7 billion was channeled to the UN's Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP), meeting just 39 per cent of the GHRP's funding requirements. NGOs directly received only 16.5 per cent of all humanitarian funding to COVID-19 response, the bulk channeled through UN agencies.

V. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY POLICIES AND MEASURES ARE CONDUCIVE TO ACHIEVING THE SDGs AND CLIMATE CHANGE GOALS

[119] https://concordeurope.org/

[120] https://reliefweb.int/report/world/tracking-global-humanitarian-response-covid-19

Governments have come under extraordinary pressures over the past few years to cope with the health crisis from COVID-19 while also mitigating the social and economic impacts. In the process, other pressing priorities have in the meantime received diminished attention. Yet, the pandemic has highlighted multiple system interdependencies and vulnerabilities which link successful COVID-19 recovery to addressing those neglected priorities.

Effective COVID-19 recovery to 'build back better' calls for a coordinated whole-of-government and whole-of-society response. In a 2020 OECD questionnaire on policy coherence mechanisms for aligning post-COVID-19 recovery plans with the SDGs, 80 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the SDGs can be used as a framework to guide the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. Yet, they also noted a high risk that short-term responses to mitigate the economic consequences of the pandemic could side-track long-term sustainable development and well-being priorities. [121] This section explores the extent to which countries, in the course of COVID response and in restarting their economies, have adopted policies and measures which align with and reinforce efforts to achieve the SDGs, rectify social and economic inequalities, and tackle climate change. Has the shock of the COVID-19 crisis dislodged governments and the international community from their comfort zones, nudged them to be more ambitious, innovative and cooperative as we seek to resume progress towards the SDGs and 2030 Agenda while having to grapple with the unfolding climate crisis?

1). Addressing inequalities and serving vulnerable populations within countries

[121] The questionnaire was completed in May 2020 by 31 respondents from 24 different countries including from governments (53%), civil society organizations (19%), international organizations (10%), academia (9%); private sector (3%) and other (2%). See https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/building-a-coherent-response-for-a-sustainable-post-covid-19-recovery-d67eab68/

As noted earlier, the pandemic has starkly reminded societies how social and economic inequalities translate into unequal vulnerabilities to severe illness and death from COVID-19. Recalling SDG 3's commitment to "universal health coverage", a number of countries have flagged in their VNRs how COVID-19 has reminded them of and reinforced this commitment. [122]

Significantly reducing deeply ingrained societal inequalities is one of the greatest challenges associated with achieving the 2030 Agenda. Not many societies have done so substantially short of revolutions. Yet, even incremental progress towards greater equality is better than none in societies with wide income and wealth gaps. It is difficult to generalize across societies, but addressing inequalities of opportunity - e.g., through ending explicit or implicit discrimination in access to quality education and quality jobs - is apt to engender less political resistance than addressing inequalities of outcome through more redistributive fiscal policies. Some countries have managed to combine the two in innovative ways which have yielded measurable results, as with Brazil's Bolsa Familia and Mexico's Progresa (both of which pre-date the SDGs). The empirical evidence on Bolsa Familia is mixed, depending on the measure of "success", but there is some reason for confidence that it has contributed to reducing societal inequalities in Brazil. [123]

[122] Countries mentioning this in their 2020 VNRs include: Argentina, Austria, Benin, Costa Rica, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine). See UN/DESA Policy Brief #85, 14 Sept. 2020; https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-85-impact-of-covid-19-perspective-from-voluntary-national-reviews/

[123] Cf. J.A. Neves et al. (2022), The Brazilian cash transfer program (Bolsa Família): A tool for reducing inequalities and achieving social rights in Brazil, Global Public Health, Vol. 17, Issue 1; https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17441692.2020.1850828?needAccess=true. While income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient had been declining for a number of years prior to the 2003 launch of Bolsa Família (from around 0.60 in 1995), it continued its decline from over 0.56 in 2003 to 0.52 in 2015 before beginning to rise again (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=BR)

Similarly, there is evidence that Progresa has contributed significantly to the reduction in income inequality in Mexico from 2004 to 2016. [124]

Beyond these examples, trends in inequality – as measured for example by the indicator for SDG target 10.1, viz., the growth of income of the bottom 40 per cent of the income distribution relative to the average income growth in a country – are mixed. [125] In the 91 countries for which data were available over the period between 2012 and 2017 (representing 60 per cent of the world population), 44 countries saw both positive growth and a higher growth rate of the bottom 40 per cent, hence diminishing inequality – including China, Malaysia and Colombia; 24 countries had positive income growth but a slower growth in income of the bottom 40 per cent, hence widening inequality – including Pakistan, United Kingdom, United States and Ethiopia; 21 countries had at least one of the two measures negative – average income growth or growth of income of bottom 40 per cent – and in 15 of those countries, the bottom 40 per cent of income earners got absolutely poorer. This was before COVID-19, whose differentially negative impacts on lower-income earners can be expected to worsen the picture.

Another way of tracking progress on the social dimensions of the 2030 Agenda is to focus on the aspiration to 'leave no one behind'. The Sustainable Development Solutions Network has constructed 'leave no one behind' indices for its Europe Sustainable Development Report, and performance on the relevant index can be found in the 2021 reports. One of the most important findings of the Europe report is that countries that top the SDG Index also top the Leave No One Behind Index, indicating that sustainable development and the reduction of inequalities are mutually reinforcing goals". [126]

[124] F. Lambert and H. Park (2019), Income inequality and government transfers in Mexico, IMF Working Paper, WP/19/148, June.
[125] The World Bank has been measuring this indicator since before the SDGs and reports on the data in its SDG Atlas 2020 edition: https://datatopics.worldbank.org/sdgatlas/goal-10-reduced-inequalities/
[126] SDSN (2021): https://www.unsdsn.org/2021-europe-sustainable-development-report.

This suggests that all countries need to pay extra attention to redressing income inequalities as governments put in place COVID-19 recovery measures if they hope to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. As Germany notes in its 2021 VNR to the HLPF, "The international community finds itself facing the challenge of making the global recovery socially and environmentally sustainable and fair. The only way to achieve this is by cutting poverty worldwide, dismantling injustices and inequalities, combating climate change, overcoming environmental challenges and reducing gender inequalities". [127]

2). Greening stimulus packages: what has been achieved to date?

A few think tanks have tracked the COVID-19 stimulus packages with a view to assessing their consistency with environmental objectives in the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. The most comprehensive of these surveys was conducted by Vivid Economics (recently acquired by McKinsey), which has produced a "greenness of stimulus" index for the Finance for Biodiversity Initiative (F4B).

Vivid Economics tracks spending on COVID-19 recovery packages across 30 countries. [128] As of 30 June 2021, it tracked a total of US$17.2 trillion in stimulus spending. It disaggregates "green" spending into climate-related spending and nature-related spending.

[127] Follow link to p. 124 of Germany's 2021 VNR: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/
[128] Greenness of Stimulus Index, Sixth Edition, July 2021:
https://www.vivideconomics.com/casestudy/greenness-for-stimulus-index/

While the bulk of spending went to short-term emergency measures, often aimed at income support to households, significantly more of the COVID-19 recovery funds went to "green" spending than was the case after the 2008 financial crisis - over US$1.8 trillion went to COVID-responsive green stimulus (roughly 10 per cent), as compared to roughly US$650 billion (inflation-adjusted) in response to the 2008 financial crisis. The overwhelming share was for climate-related purposes. Across the board, nature and biodiversity were almost completely ignored, with a greater proportion of spending damaging nature than enhancing it.

Only Canada and Europe have invested in areas which significantly shift their economies in greener directions. As the Vivid Economics analysis notes: "Denmark and Canada made the largest overall efforts to reorient their economies through the stimulus spending, with the European Commission's spending, and national-level stimulus packages in the UK, France, Germany, Finland, Spain and Sweden achieving strongly positive outcomes. Other more advanced economies - such as Japan, South Korea, Italy and Australia - made some efforts but did not manage to achieve a transformational shift through their stimulus."

The greenness assessment and ranking are based on how far specific COVID response spending measures either positively or negatively impact on climate and nature; of the US$17.2 billion tracked, it was estimated that US$4.8 trillion, or 28 per cent, was destined for environmentally intensive sectors, impacting climate, biodiversity or local air quality. The index score for each country is a composite of the amount flowing into specific sectors, the degree of current green orientation of those sectors, and the extent to which the new flows are "green"-targeted. Of the 30 countries rated, 20 had a negative index score, meaning that the size of spending with negative impacts on these indicators exceeded that of spending with positive impacts.

For those countries whose ranking was on balance negative, Vivid Economics notes: [129]

- Large economies like the US, China and India have not to date managed to fundamentally reorient their economic trajectories, despite channeling some stimulus toward a green and resilient transition;

- In other emerging markets like Indonesia, Mexico, the Philippines and Russia, stimulus has not taken on a significant green orientation, and in some cases, it has further reinforced high-carbon and low resilience economic activities.

The Greenness of Stimulus Index report also catalogues specific policy measures and investments per country which are thought to have had the greatest positive climate and environmental impact (a number of those measures are flagged in section 6).

The Green Recovery Tracker [130] focuses its assessment specifically on EU member States' COVID response and recovery efforts, including their Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs) formulated as the basis for accessing the NextGenerationEU stimulus package and, in particular, its Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). The think tanks producing the Tracker evaluated the green spending share of 18 European countries' recovery plans, focusing on four sectors (mobility, buildings, energy, and industry; more than half of EU recovery spending was not specific to these sectors). It found that €210bn (US$237 bn) out of the €716bn (US$809 bn) analyzed - or one-third - is set to accelerate the green transition, while €54.2bn (US$61.2 bn) could, in fact, negatively impact the green transition. Furthermore, the Tracker assessed that €187 bn (US$206 bn, or 26 per cent) of the stimulus spending would have a climate impact whose direction and size could not be determined due to the "lack of clarity or detail" on how measures would be implemented.

[129] Idem.
[130] https://www.greenrecoverytracker.org/

Besides the EU programme, individual EU members developed recovery and resilience plans to support clean technologies and renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable transportation and recharging stations, broadband services, green transition, digital transformation, and education and skills training. [131]

3). Addressing systemic issues hindering global transformation towards sustainable development

The 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Glasgow, United Kingdom, in November 2021 highlighted some of the major systemic barriers to a more rapid transformation of the global economy, in this case towards net-zero by 2050. One of the biggest barriers remains inadequate international financial support to enable developing countries to raise their ambitions for greenhouse gas reduction in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement. The beginning of this decade was to have marked the delivery of developed countries' commitment to mobilize US$100 billion a year in climate finance for developing countries, and yet at the end of 2021 that target had yet to be achieved. There can be little doubt that greater ambition on decarbonization in many developing countries will require importing technologies and systems from abroad. The pandemic has only exacerbated the debt burdens of many developing countries, and under these conditions, it is hard to imagine they have the capacity or will to borrow even more to import low-carbon energy, transport and other technologies and systems.

[131] Congressional Research Service (2021), Global Economic Effects of COVID-19, 10 November: https://crsreports.congress.gov.

As countries face growing pressures in the next few years to raise ambition on climate action (and also aim to accelerate progress towards the SDGs in this Decade of Action), either the commitment to international solidarity will be fortified or the international community will fail. Countries will find it politically and economically too costly to forge ahead with decarbonization while potential economic competitors lag behind. Yet, in the case of many developing countries, significantly bolder decarbonization action will most likely be predicated on international financial support in direct proportion to the per capita income gap between themselves and the developed world.

As developing countries become more prosperous - and many are already middle-income countries, the prospects grow that private sector investment can be attracted to finance a significant portion of the decarbonization transition. Critical to facilitating international private capital flows to this end will be creating favorable enabling conditions for clean energy, electric vehicle, and other low-carbon foreign investment, including through continued reforms to international corporate taxation rules to ensure developing countries collect their fair share of corporate tax revenues.

In developed and developing countries alike, central bankers and stock market regulators increasingly recognize that climate change - and more recently nature destruction - can pose material risks to financial institutions, private companies and investors, risks that they are increasingly insisting those banks and publicly-traded companies take into account and make transparent. The expectation is that, once those risks are scientifically assessed and made public to investors and others, there would be incentives for the latter to de-risk their portfolios or to change their consumption choices in ways which would steer capital towards sustainable, low-carbon investments. Central bankers meanwhile are studying how far the financial

risks associated with climate change may be more systemic in nature, possibly threatening in the future to destabilize entire financial systems and economies. [132]

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING POLICIES AND MEASURES IN ORDER TO ACCELERATE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA AND THE PARIS AGREEMENT

In introducing the 2021 UN Sustainable Development Goals Report, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs observes:

Historically, pandemics have served as catalysts for political, economic and social change, and that still holds true today. The year 2021 will be decisive as to whether or not the world can make the transformations needed to deliver on the promise to achieve the SDGs by 2030 - with implications for us all. [133]

He appeals for "[a] recommitment by Governments, cities, businesses, and industries to ensure that the recovery reduces carbon emissions, conserves natural resources, creates better jobs, advances gender equality and tackles growing poverty and inequalities ... ." [134]

Many governments, regional groupings and others have committed to 'building back better' by which most mean transitioning toward sustainable, green economies and more equal societies, in other words, to accelerating progress towards the SDGs and the goals of the Paris Agreement.

[132] See speech of Lael Brainard, US Federal Reserve Vice-Chair, on stress-testing financial systems for climate risks:
https://www.federalreserve.gov/newsevents/speech/brainard20211007a.htm
[133] Liu Zhenmin, View from the pandemic: stark realities, critical choices, in ibid., p. 3.
[134] Foreword to United Nations (2021), The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021, New York.

Inequalities are persistent and so evidence of significant reduction, should it exist, would only become evident several years hence. The data cited above from the World Bank paint a mixed picture, with slightly fewer than half of the 90 countries in the sample showing reduced inequality (on the 'relative income growth of the bottom 40%' measure). That leaves a sizeable number of countries, some very big countries, where inequalities are growing. As noted in the previous section, so far, many countries are falling short on the "greening" side.

Given the mixed performance and the presumed continued commitment of all countries to achieving the SDGs and implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, what can we say – based on the actual experience of more successful countries and regional and global initiatives – about how to accelerate progress in all the dimensions of sustainable development in the coming years? What policies and measures should governments consider implementing, and what can be done by other actors to ensure all countries build back better (more equitably and greener) from COVID-19?

1). Accelerate progress on measures to reduce inequalities within societies

The 2030 Agenda has as a core principle to 'leave no one behind', which necessitates ensuring that the poorest and most vulnerable members of society are participants in the shared prosperity which is one of the agenda's overriding objectives.

If in progressing towards any of the Sustainable Development Goals, the poorest and most vulnerable are lagging the rest of society, then some are being left behind. The universality of the SDGs – committing to education and health and adequate nutrition and decent work for all – implies that no one, and certainly not the poorest and most vulnerable, should be excluded from

the benefits of sustainable development. [135] Temporarily, the 2030 Agenda calls for reaching those farthest behind first, which calls for targeted policies and extraordinary efforts, as these groups and individuals may face especially high barriers to progress in various areas of human development – often because of historical disadvantages.

Practically speaking, what specific measures can help governments and others to honor the commitment to leave no one behind in the remainder of the Decade of Action? The range of measures is very broad, but the main categories of policy and institutional intervention center around the provision of opportunities for all members of society to access:

- quality nutrition and health care;
- quality education at least through the secondary level and very often beyond;
- decent jobs paying a 'living wage';
- decent housing in safe communities;
- equal justice under the law;
- voice in decisions affecting their lives.

Given the different ways in which inequalities manifest themselves and the particular groups most affected in different societies, each may need to define a number of country-specific 'leave no one behind' indicators. In the case of the United States, for example, the SDSN United States Sustainable Development Report 2021 contains a list of 21 indicators, of which eight measure racial disparities, e.g., in homelessness, youth incarceration, child poverty, toxic air burden from factories, and rent burden. Besides race and ethnicity, gender, age, disability, refugee or migration status, and geographic location are other dimensions in which discrimination and differential vulnerabilities can manifest themselves.

[135] The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) uses the 'leave no one behind' criterion to justify the optimum value of several of the indicators included in its SDG Index; see https://www.unsdsn.org/sdg-index-and-monitoring and in particular Table 4.6 of the 2021 Sustainable Development Report at that link.

Following are three broad categories of policy, law and investment aimed at fostering social inclusion and leaving no one behind, with selected examples from a rich tapestry of measures described in countries' VNRs. [136]

Ensure access to basic human needs for the poorest and most vulnerable. Nutritious foods, water and sanitation, health care, including pre- and neonatal care, housing, clean energy and social protection.

Bangladesh (2020 VNR):

- health services extended on a priority basis to persons with disabilities in the community clinics;
- community clinics-based services, including the provision of separate toilets for women and girls, the establishment of breastfeeding corners, nutrition corners, and other facilities in public hospitals which have contributed to increasing access of poor women to health services.

Kenya (2020 VNR):

- the National Social Protection Policy has identified several key social protection interventions and actions in the areas of social assistance, social security, and health insurance. It plays an important role in increasing access to social welfare services for those with no predictable income, those in employment and the self-employed who need a financial cushion against future risks such as loss of employment, injury at work, loss of assets, or sickness;
- an Equalisation Fund, created to enhance the provision of basic services including water, roads, and electricity and health facilities in disadvantaged geographic areas;

[136] See links to VNRs presented at the HLPF here: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/

o M-TIBA - a service on a mobile phone that allows one to save, send and spend funds for medical treatment covering the uncovered especially low-income earners.

Kyrgyzstan (2020 VNR):

o in 2018 a government decree was adopted introducing the "personal assistant" service to children with disabilities. Personal assistance has been seen as an important social tool for the empowerment, independence and participation of disabled children in society. Additionally, it reduces unemployment among family members and/or legal caregivers, ensuring progress across multiple SDGs.

Nepal (2020 VNR):

o In 2017 and 2018, the Parliament passed multiple pieces of social protection legislation: the Act Relating to Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Right to Food and Food Sovereignty Act, the Right to Housing Act, the Right to Employment Act, the Right to Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Act, the Social Security Act, the Act Relating to Children, and the Act Relating to Compulsory and Free Education.

Seychelles (2020 VNR):

o Offers free healthcare and education, universal retirement pensions for Seychellois aged 63 and above, and various social safety nets to protect the most vulnerable.

Samoa (2020 VNR):

o an extensive network of social protection measures across different population groups. This includes fee-free public and mission school education for Years 1-8 in primary and Years 9-11 in secondary schools, fee-free medical care at public health facilities for children up to 12 years, fee-free antenatal

o health care, fee-free health care for pensioners and people with chronic illnesses including with disabilities and mental health illnesses; fee-free inter-island travel for pensioners oand people with chronic illnesses including with disabilities and mental health illnesses; fee-free inter-island travel for pensioners.

Expand significantly economic opportunities for those excluded, disadvantaged. Education and training, jobs, capital, entrepreneurial and financial management skills.

Bangladesh:

o In all eight Administrative Divisions, 10 fully free special schools for children with autism have been introduced. In the 2017 and 2018 academic years, 18,108 Braille method textbooks were distributed to 2,194 visually impaired students. 'Job Fairs' have been arranged for disabled people.

Kenya:

o Empowering women through entrepreneurship skills and financial support through Women Enterprise Fund; implementing leadership development programmes for women and girls; empowerment programmes including supply of sanitary towels to schoolgirls; provision and enforcement of re-entry policy for girls;
o Implementation of AGPO that ensure women, youth and persons with disabilities have access to government procurement opportunities.

Samoa:

o Early in the pandemic, the Maua App was launched, an e-commerce platform developed by a Samoan owned company (SkyEye Pacific, partnering with the WIBDI - Women In Business Development, Inc.) to help

rural farmers, fishermen, and artisans to access buyers in the urban areas through an online 'Virtual Market'. The market included 30 vendors with up to 150 different products that were 'pre-sold' online using mobile phones. Products ranged from seagrapes, seafood, to handicrafts, mats, baskets and body oils.

Provide accessible avenues for participation, voice and empowerment of disadvantaged, vulnerable groups and individuals.

Bangladesh:

o Women Friendly Hospital Initiative programme for addressing women's rights and discriminations suffered by women/girls. Under the Programme, 28 women-friendly hospitals render specialized psychosocial counselling to women survivors of violence and link them with legal aid agencies.

Costa Rica (2020 VNR):

o To combat discrimination against Indigenous Peoples and Afro descendant Populations, the government is implementing the National Policy for a Society Free of Racism, Racial Discrimination, and Xenophobia, 2014- 2025;
o At the same time, working with various UN organizations, the government is creating a National Policy on Indigenous Peoples and a National Policy on People of African Descent based on participatory processes;
o Framework for Protection and Response Solutions to the Situation of Refugees (MINARE), a MINARE framework developed in a national consultation process with all relevant stakeholders who provide assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees, including public sector, private sector, academia, civil society and faith-based groups. The result of the national

consultation process with all relevant stakeholders who provide assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees, including public sector, private sector, academia, civil society and faith-based groups. The result of the national consultation was a list of 32 commitments organized in four main areas: reception and admission; assistance for immediate and persistent needs; support for host communities; and integration.

Finland (2020 VNR):

o current Government Programme includes a variety of measures related to the promotion of equality, such as national action plans for combating racism and discrimination and promoting good relations between population groups, a partial reform of the Non-Discrimination Act, a working life diversity programme and a suburban development programme;

Kenya:

o programme on 'Making every woman and girl count' to stimulate the sustained production and dissemination of quality gender statistics for monitoring the 54 gender-related SDG indicators.

Reducing inequalities must go hand in hand with sustainably transforming economies towards being net-zero greenhouse gas emitters and nature-positive. This suggests that, as countries and other actors put in place ambitious commitments to decarbonize (under the Paris Agreement) and to reverse biodiversity loss (under the post-2020 global biodiversity framework currently under negotiation), they must build in from the outset institutional, policy and other provisions to secure a 'just transition'. [137]

[137] For a history of this concept and where it stands at moment, see J. Makower (2021) in GreenBiz: https://www.greenbiz.com/article/just-transition-new-net-zero#:~:text=In%202018%2C%20%22just%20transition%22,movement%20to%20the%20global%20stage.&text=In%20May%2C%2027%20companies%20including,%2Dcreating%20net%2Dzero%20economy.

The parameters and metrics of this concept are still evolving, but efforts have been made to systematize thinking on 'just transition' [138], and it is easy to see how it is related to the 2030 Agenda's aspiration to leave no one behind which nevertheless is more expansive.

2). Restore economic growth and accelerate the 'green transition'

As noted by the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action (see above), investment recovery from the pandemic is lagging in emerging and developing countries. These countries have the opportunity to boost nature- and climate-friendly investments as part of their recovery efforts, having experienced relatively sharp declines in investment's share of GDP during the pandemic. This will not however happen automatically. It will require steering and incentives provided by government policy, including governments' own investment decisions. Several countries in their VNRs indicated that they would use recovery to move towards greener, lower-emissions economies.

Vivid Economics, based on its Greenness of Stimulus Index research [139], catalogues a number of measures governments can take as part of recovery efforts, including:

- attaching green conditions to industry bailouts, for example, of airlines;
- investing in nature-based solutions;
- providing loans and grants for green investments;
- removing subsidies for polluters;
- providing tax breaks or subsidies for green products and R&D;
- reinforcing environmental regulation, avoiding deregulation;
- creating an enabling environment and fiscal framework that redirects investment away from environmentally damaging activities and towards those that support a sustainable transition.

[138] https://justtransitioninitiative.org/a-framework-for-just-transitions/
[139] Vivid Economics (2021), op. cit., p. 5.

In the early days of the pandemic, some governments decided to forego "greenness" in the interests of quick disbursement of funds to individuals and industries severely affected by shutdowns. Thus, for example, while France placed both environmental and social conditionalities on support to the airline industry, the United States did not. [140]

Shift government subsidies decisively away from environmentally harmful towards green activities. Not all countries have the same fiscal space to incentivize green investments, but one place to start in many countries (developed and developing alike) would be to reform harmful energy/fossil-fuel subsidies and agricultural, fisheries and other subsidies, repurposing them to ensure that they do no harm to the climate and nature while also protecting the poor and vulnerable. The Executive Secretary of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity made an appeal to all countries in May 2021 to review and adapt support measures for agriculture, fishing and other industries that are driving the destruction of the natural world. [141]

Invest in sustainable infrastructure, research and development. There is a need to anchor COVID-19 recovery plans in long-term strategies (LTSs) and updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement. [142] One suggestion is that countries set up sector-specific platforms for the key sectors targeted for transformation, to coordinate

[140] For France: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-airfrance-france/france-will-continue-massive-support-for-air-transport-sector-finance-minister-idUSKBN2BU25N ; for USA: https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/us-airlines-defend-54-billion-covid-19-government-lifeline-2021-12-15/

[141] Quoted in The Guardian of London: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/02/redirect-harmful-subsidies-to-benefit-planet-un-urges-governments-aoe. See also the 2021 report prepared by FAO, UNDP and UNEP, A Multi-Billion-Dollar Opportunity: Repurposing agricultural support to transform food systems: https://www.unep.org/resources/repurposing-agricultural-support-transform-food-systems

[142] Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action (2021), op. cit., p. 5.

actors and mobilize investments at scale. [143] In the case of agriculture, FAO et al. suggest to shift from crop-specific subsidies towards support for infrastructure and R&D, including climate-adapted crops, varieties and cropping systems. [144]

Apply nature-positive criteria to public and private investment decisions. Governments and the private sector have come some way in recent years towards applying climate-impact criteria to their investments, including through the work of the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action and the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures. [145] Biodiversity and nature-related disclosures are now receiving attention as well through a similar task force. [146] The latter task force has set the goal of developing a framework that will "serve as amechanism to helporganisations understand, disclose andmanage the financialrisks and opportunitiesassociated with the deteriorating state of natureand a transitionto an economyconsistent with meetingfuture nature-related international agreements suchas the UNConvention on BiologicalDiversity (CBD) andthe ambitions set outin its forthcomingPost-2020 Global BiodiversityFramework." [147]

With regard to public expenditures, Vivid Economics identifies a need and an opportunity "to develop a nature-focused budgeting approach that directly links public finance to nature impacts. The approach must enable government decision-makers to connect policy levers with nature impacts, and make transparent the effects upon nature of finance decisions." [148]

Given the underdeveloped state of private investment in nature and nature-based solutions, vehicles are urgently needed in the interim to mobilize

[143] Idem.
[144] FAO et al. (2021), op.cit., p. 120.
[145] https://www.fsb-tcfd.org/
[146] https://tnfd.global/
[147] TNFD Proposed Technical Scope: https://tnfd.global/publication/proposed-technical-scope-for-tnfd/
[148] Vivid Economics (2021), op.cit., p. 5.

greater private investment through derisking, including by greater resort to structured blended finance. Scaling private investment in climate and nature would also benefit from further development of sustainable bond markets and the creation of a sustainable infrastructure as well as a natural capital asset class. [149]

3). Strengthening international cooperation and governance

National governments, sub-national governments, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders are in the front lines of the long march towards the sustainable development goals and achieving the 2030 Agenda. This is a global, universal agenda multilaterally agreed by all governments as the basis for international economic, social and environmental cooperation. Yet, multilateral cooperation in support of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda remains limited. Each year national governments come to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development at the United Nations in New York to present voluntary national reviews of their progress. Yet, too little attention is paid to strengthening multilateral support for the SDGs and 2030 Agenda.

Stabilizing the global climate system is a 'global public good' that cannot possibly be addressed without strengthened international cooperation. The Paris Agreement is the premier multilateral instrument for cooperation among governments to that end, but so far it has been inadequate to the task.

So, to achieve the SDGs and 2030 Agenda as well as to tackle climate change, the international community needs honest reflection on how it is performing and how that performance can be improved.

[149] The One Planet Lab (2021), Blended finance for scaling up climate and nature investments, Grantham Institute, London School of Economics, November: https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Blended-Finance-for-Scaling-Up-Climate-and-Nature-Investments-1.pdf

The Secretary-General's report, Our Common Agenda, is one stock-taking effort, meant to "turbo-charge" implementation of the 2030 Agenda including but not limited to tackling climate change. That report is discussed below. First, we consider the status of multilateral agreements/treaties among governments, then voluntary initiatives involving multiple stakeholders, finally examining the Secretary-General's recommendations.

3.1 Multilateral, intergovernmental initiatives

What about the multilateral cooperation framework? How can it be strengthened?

Multilateral treaties are central to setting frameworks of rules for international cooperation, including for international trade, addressing climate change and biodiversity loss. While treaties are in principle legally binding, many have weak to non-existent enforcement mechanisms (the major exception being trade rules under the World Trade Organization with its arbitration process and sanctioning of certain retaliatory measures).

The reality of the past few decades is that such multilateral treaty processes have not resulted in the decisive actions needed to address global climate change and biodiversity loss. (Neither has the trade regime been particularly effective in pre-empting unilateral trade measures.) The urgent questions are: Why? and what to do about it?

With respect to climate change, the approach through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Paris Agreement is to continue to hope that, with each successive stock-take of progress, governments will raise significantly the ambition of their climate commitments reflected in their Nationally Determined Contributions. In Glasgow, Parties to the UNFCCC recognized that the raising of ambition needs to happen more frequently, with Parties expected to revisit and enhance their NDCs this year.

It seems doubtful that confidence in this process can survive much longer if countries fail next time around to narrow significantly if not close the emissions gap – the gap between projected emissions based on NDC commitments and the emissions levels consistent with staying below 2 or 1.5 degrees Celsius. [150]

What more can, should, be done? Various proposals are under discussion, none without its challenges and opposition. Perhaps the most contentious is the EU proposal for a carbon border adjustment mechanism, as part of the European Green Deal, to 'level up' the playing field by taxing imports of emissions-intensive products from countries with lower implicit carbon prices than in the European Union. [151] Another proposal, advanced recently by the IMF, is for an international carbon price floor. [152] This starts from the Nordhaus suggestion of a 'climate club' [153] of countries; in the IMF case

[150] https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2021

[151] For a critical examination of CBAM, see Venzke and Vidigal (2022), Are Trade Measures to Tackle the Climate Crisis the End of Differentiated Responsibilities? The Case of the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), Amsterdam Law School Legal Studies Research Paper No. 2022-02, Amsterdam Center for International Law No. 2022-02, University of Amsterdam, 24 Jan 2022.

[152] See Gaspar and Parry (2021), A proposal to scale up global carbon pricing, June 18, https://blogs.imf.org/2021/06/18/a-proposal-to-scale-up-global-carbon-pricing/#:~:text=The%20federal%20government%20requires%20provinces,taxes%20or%20emissions%20trading%20systems

[153] See https://environment-review.yale.edu/can-climate-club-help-solve-global-warming-crisis-0; the Nordhaus proposal was for the club members to agree to a domestic carbon price and a border tax adjustment levied on those outside the club.

the 'club' would consist of the major emitters – the USA, EU, China and India – the idea being that this price floor would neutralize pressures to resort to carbon border adjustments (CBAs). [154] Those interested in joining the club can do so by paying the membership fee of a minimum carbon price, in exchange for the benefits including avoidance of CBAs on their exports. The question arises of how this relates to the Paris Agreement which involves multiple countries beyond these few dozen. It is in principle possible to integrate a minimum carbon price into a country's or area's (e.g., EU's) offer under the Paris Agreement, with all members of the club agreeing to do the same. [155] Such a 'coalition of ambition' is both compatible with the Paris Agreement and needed to close the emissions gap, in the authors' assessment. [156]

An alternative proposal, advanced by Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University, would have different carbon prices levied in different country groups, classed by per capita income, with the richest setting the highest price and upper-middle-income economies setting a somewhat lower one. Governments could then collect revenue in the form either of a carbon tax or a levy on carbon market transactions, using that to finance a global fund for ensuring adequate financial resources are made available to low-income developing

[154] See Parry, Black and Roaf (2021), IMF: https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/staff-climate-notes/Issues/2021/06/15/Proposal-for-an-International-Carbon-Price-Floor-Among-Large-Emitters-460468.

[155] Cf. McKibbin et al. (2014), A Proposal to Integrate Price Mechanisms into Climate Negotiations, Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies 1: 600-608.

[156] As Parry et al. (2021) note, the Paris Agreement "allows for 'mini-lateral' agreements to augment ambition, since it was well-known by negotiators at the time of drafting that the then-intended nationally determined contributions were not sufficient for achieving the Agreement's temperature goals." They go on to note that the focus on price floors, rather than price levels, accommodates countries needing to exceed the floor price to meet their Paris mitigation pledges.

countries both to mitigate emissions and to adapt to climate change. [157] As the carbon levy would be raised at periodic intervals, the size of the fund would also increase.

With respect to biodiversity, Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity are in negotiations on the details of a post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Among the outstanding issues is the setting of targets to 2050 and, closely related to that, arrangements for financial support to developing countries which harbor large amounts of the remaining biodiversity in the world, to help them conserve it. The logic is clear: biodiversity conservation like climate stability is a matter of protection of a global commons with benefits for all of humanity; thus, it is the responsibility of all humanity to share equitably the costs of that protection. While the Paris Agreement and UNFCCC have a dedicated fund for this purpose – in the Green Climate Fund – as well as a variety of other funds and financing mechanisms, the only thing comparable for biodiversity is the Global Environment Facility (GEF) [158], which covers other global environmental problems as well and still leaves a sizeable biodiversity financing gap.

Can countries agree to a dedicated global biodiversity fund with secure and generous financing? The current draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework recognizes the biodiversity financing gap (as estimated for

[157] See https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/fixing-climate-finance-requires-global-rules-by-jeffrey-d-sachs-2021-11. Sachs calls for a system of levies on emissions in countries at different levels of development (high-income country would be levied US$5 per ton of carbon dioxide emitted; upper-middle-income countries US$2.50 per ton; these rates would double in five years), to be made available for mitigation and adaptation investments in low- and lower-middle-income countries. The total, given current emissions, would come to around $100 billion. If half were given in grants and the other half made available as capital to multilateral banks, the $50 billion in capital could potentially leverage $200 billion in green bonds for issuance to developing countries, thus making for $250 billion in international public climate finance, rising to $500 billion in five years.

[158] In October 2021, at the first session of COP-15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, China, President of COP-15, announced the creation of a new global biodiversity fund, committing US$250 million and inviting other countries to contribute; https://www.paulsoninstitute.org/our-stories/financing-nature-and-the-global-conversation-on-biodiversity/

example in Paulson Institute et al., 2020) [159] and proposes to close it through a combination of subsidy (incentive) reform (agriculture, fisheries, etc.) and additional financing to be mobilized from all sources. It estimates savings in perverse subsidies/incentives of $500 billion a year, and stipulates additional financing of $200 billion a year, but the additional amount specified as international financing for developing countries is only a minimum of $10 billion. [160]

3.2 Corporate and civil society initiatives

A variety of stakeholders have sought greater ambition on providing global public goods through other channels, including bringing institutional investor pressure to bear on publicly traded companies. Partly in response to such pressures, partly in anticipation of stronger international and national government action in the future, some companies have sought to align their performance with so-called 'science-based targets' pertaining to greenhouse gas emissions [161], and efforts are underway to define comparable targets for nature and biodiversity impacts of corporate actions.

One complication of this approach is that most large corporations are multinational in reach, with supply chains circling the globe. The headquarters of such companies may only loosely govern certain suppliers' behavior (Scope 3 emissions) [162], while customers and investors expect

[159] https://www.paulsoninstitute.org/conservation/financing-nature-report/
[160] See CBD: https://www.paulsoninstitute.org/conservation/financing-nature-report/ ; IUCN takes the position that significantly more is needed by way of international financial transfers to developing countries for biodiversity, quoting a figure of $60 billion per year.
[161] https://sciencebasedtargets.org/ ; in October 2021, this initiative launched a new 'net-zero' corporate standard: https://sciencebasedtargets.org/news/sbti-launches-world-first-net-zero-corporate-standard
[162] Scope 3 emissions are the result of activities from assets not owned or controlled by the reporting organization, but that the organization indirectly impacts in its value chain. (USEPA: https://www.epa.gov/climateleadership/scope-3-inventory-guidance)

them to exert strong influence thereon. This has led various sectors to institute roundtables with actors along the supply chain in an effort to reach an agreement on common standards for 'sustainable supply chains' in a given sector, whether palm oil, soya beans, or others. There remains contention between different actors in the supply chain and governments at different stages of the chain over what constitutes an appropriately stringent standard and how best to support small-scale suppliers in complying with that standard. [163]

Various certification schemes have emerged to promote sustainability in specific industries and supply chains – for example, those of the Forest Stewardship and Marine Stewardship Council labels and the Social Accountability Standard for labor-intensive industries like garments and footwear. Thus far, these schemes have had only limited impact on the problems they were designed to address, as the most rapidly growing markets for their products are generally in countries where consumers do not yet constitute a strong lobby for such standards and labeling schemes and, even in countries where such 'sustainability-conscious consumers' are more common, they still represent a small share of the market.

3.3 The Secretary-General's proposal: Our Common Agenda [164]

The Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda [165] lays out a series of proposals for consideration by UN Member States as elements of a roadmap for accelerated SDG and 2030 Agenda implementation. The proposals cover a broad range of areas spanning 12 'commitments', viz., (1) leave no one behind; (2) protect our planet; (3) promote peace and prevent conflicts; (4) abide by international law and ensure justice; (5) place women and girls at the center; (6) build trust; (7) improved digital cooperation; (8) upgrade the

[163] One well-documented case is the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil: https://rspo.org/. For the standards developed and issued by RSPO, including one for independent small holders, see: https://rspo.org/standards

[164] Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary-General, United Nations, September 2021; https://www.un.org/en/un75/common-agenda.

[165] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

United Nations; (9) ensure sustainable financing; (10) boost partnerships; (11) listen to and work with youth; (12) be prepared.

The President of the 76th Session of the General Assembly held a series of consultations with Member States in early 2022 on various commitments and proposals. This paper does not review all the many proposals but points to those that seemed to garner the broadest UN Member State report at these consultations, in particular those that speak most directly to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The first proposal under "Leave no one behind" is for a "renewed social contract anchored in human rights". In describing that contract, an emphasis is placed on concerns of youth and future generations, and several other proposals speak directly to engaging youth in the UN's work and building consideration of the interests of future generations into international decision-making. The renewal is warranted, in the Secretary-General's estimation, by the demands of a new era where individuals, States and other actors work in partnership to build trust, increase participation and inclusion, and redefine human progress. [166]

In the Secretary-General's words, "Just as the founders of the United Nations came together determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, we must now come together to save succeeding generations from war, climate change, pandemics, hunger, poverty, injustice and a host of risks that we may not yet foresee entirely. This is Our Common Agenda." It is also the 2030 Agenda.

In Chapter IV of Our Common Agenda, the Secretary-General spells out his vision of what is needed to strengthen governance of "our global commons and global public goods", including the Earth's climate system and oceans as well as global health, the global economy and scientific knowledge. In his view, " this does not require new institutions. Rather, we need new resolve

[166] Ibid., p. 17.

and ways of working together that are suited to the challenges we face and the diverse landscape of actors (public, civic and private) that have the capacity to contribute to solutions." [167]

Some key elements of the Secretary-General's proposals on governance of global public goods and the global commons are summarized here.

a) Global health

The Secretary-General calls for a global vaccination plan to be rolled out urgently to try to bring the pandemic to an end. Longer-term, the emphasis needs to be on prevention, preparedness and equity. As part of preparedness, he calls for building on the ACT-Accelerator model to promote vaccine and other pharmaceutical products and health technology production in low- and middle-income countries. He also encourages further consideration of means to facilitate technology transfers, including commitments to voluntary licensing in cases where public funding has been invested in research and development.

b) Global economy that works for all

The Secretary-General notes with alarm the failure of the international community to rally behind a global vaccination drive, despite the exceptionally high benefit-cost ratio of doing so. He also notes the fragility of global supply chains in the face of the pandemic-induced stresses. Further, he emphasizes that per capita GDP has proven a highly imperfect indicator of vulnerability to the economic impacts of the pandemic, not to mention those of climate change.

Among specific initiatives proposed by the Secretary-General:

[167] Ibid., p. 48.

- a Biennial Summit at the level of heads of State and Government between the members of the G20 and the members of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, the Secretary-General and the heads of the international financial institutions "to work towards a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient global economy". [168] The rationale given is "to combine more systematically the respective strengths of relevant bodies and to make fuller use of the follow-up to the intergovernmental process on financing for sustainable development"; [169]

- forming a "'last mile alliance' to catalyse and elevate policy action to reach those furthest behind as part of efforts to achieve the Goals" [170] on trade, aligning trade more closely with the green and circular economy, including by broadening negotiations on environmental goods and services -on tax policy coordination, stronger global cooperation to address tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance as well as illicit financial flows; [171] [172]

- on development assistance, a shift away from heavy reliance on GDP to determine access to concessional finance and support, introducing also indices of vulnerability to external shocks and systemic risk criteria.

c) Healthy planet

[168] Ibid., p. 54.
[169] If the intention is to delve into how to mobilize financing to support the transformations needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, then engagement is also recommended with the High-Level Political Forum (which is responsible for catalyzing global efforts at achieving sustainable development).
[170] Idem.
[171] Dempsey et al. (2022), Comment: Biodiversity targets will not be met without debt and tax justice, Nature: Ecology and Evolution, make the case that combatting tax evasion and illicit flows can mobilize sizeable public funds to direct towards biodiversity and nature conservation, among other socially desirable expenditures.
[172] See Financial Integrity for Sustainable Development, Report of the High Level Panel on International Financial Accountability, Transparency and Integrity for Achieving the 2030 Agenda, United Nations, 2021.

The Secretary-General enumerates a series of measures needed to address environmental crises, including:

On climate change:

- Act with a greater sense of urgency: treat climate change as a global emergency requiring a coordinated emergency response;

- Climate change mitigation: Parties to the UNFCCC and other stakeholders need to "present more ambitious 2030 national climate plans and deliver on concrete policies and actions aligned with a net-zero future, including no new coal after 2021, shifting fossil fuel subsidies to renewable energy and setting a carbon price", including consideration by the G20 of the IMF proposal for an international carbon price floor; [173]

- A solidarity package to support developing countries: beginning with meeting the US$100 billion commitment, with half devoted to adaptation and resilience building; aligning multilateral bank portfolios to the Paris Agreement; technological support and capacity building; negotiation of a new post-2025 climate finance goal; [174] [175]

- Financial actors to make concrete commitments to net-zero: All G20 financial actors must "set verifiable targets that cover their entire portfolios to shift them away from high-emission sectors to the climate resilient and net-zero economy, along with timelines to implement their pledges"; [176]

- Recognize and address the growing threat of territorial loss, population displacement and involuntary migration posed by climate change and nature degradation.

[173] Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary-General, United Nations, September 2021, pp. 55, 58.
[174] Ibid., p. 57.
[175] See the proposal by Jeffrey Sachs (https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/fixing-climate-finance-requires-global-rules-by-jeffrey-d-sachs-2021-11) described above.
[176] Our Common Agenda, p. 58.

On biodiversity and a clean, healthy environment:

- a strong global post-2020 biodiversity framework with adequate provisions for financing nature conservation in developing countries; [177]

- transformation of the global food system to ensure that, in the face of ongoing climate change, it is able to provide healthy food security to the world's growing population while reversing its devastating impacts on biodiversity;

- universal recognition of the right to a healthy environment. [178]

VII. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

"The fierce urgency of now." [179]

This phrase captures well the message emerging from the preceding analysis. The world can wait no longer for bold action to address the multiple challenges we face as humans and as an international community - stark inequalities, climate change, degradation of the natural world and, layered on top and intimately linked, a raging and deadly global pandemic. All of this augurs poorly for the start of the Decade of Action, unless we can move quickly to transform crises into opportunities. So far, the evidence is decidedly mixed, tilted even towards business-as-usual in many countries.

[177] Ibid., p. 59.
[178] In October 2021, in resolution 48/13, the United Nations Human Rights Council recognized the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, with 43 votes in favor (including Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico and Pakistan) and four abstentions (China, India, Japan and Russia); https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1102582
[179] Dr. Martin Luther King in his 'I have a dream' speech at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C., 28 August 1963.

Various analyses have identified the desired transformations – in social protection and inclusion, energy and food systems, the macro relationship of the economy to the environment and natural resource extraction and use, the measurement of well-being and progress, and so on. Such transformations do not happen overnight, but they never happen if governments individually and collectively cannot muster the political will to implement the policies and undertake the public investments to steer economies and societies in a sustainable direction. When such bold transformations are needed, and these go against conventional consumption and production patterns, institutions, behaviors and even values, governments must be courageous enough to lead. They must bring along other actors – business and finance, civil society and NGOs – but they must show clear direction and provide clear signals as to what actions and behaviors will be tolerated and rewarded and which ones are to be discouraged and even penalized.

Societies are deeply divided across the globe today, and it is hard to conceive how a societal consensus can emerge around the sometimes difficult actions that need to be taken – from decarbonizing our economies to changing our high-consumption lifestyles in the advanced and emerging economies to redistributing wealth, income and opportunities to the benefit of those people who have been until now left behind in the pursuit of shared prosperity. Yet, if anything can and ought to unite people, it is the recognition that the short-sighted (and at times selfish) decisions which have prevailed for decades and even centuries now risk bequeathing to future generations, beginning with the children and young people of today, a far more troubled world – one wracked by worsening climate change, destruction of the natural world, forced migration and conflict, and societies where large portions of the population are doomed to futures without opportunity and hope. This is a world towards which we are rushing, unless we can muster all our determination and ingenuity and solidarity decisively to change course.

The 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement provide our blueprints, Our Common Agenda provides elements of the roadmap. Let's all charge our batteries, turn on our GPS and accelerate towards a sustainable, just, inclusive and peaceful future!

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