



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Are we leaving no one behind in eradicating poverty and working towards the 2030 Agenda?

(including what COVID-19 is telling us about inequalities and the weakness in our social systems)

Thursday, 9 July, 10:30am – 12:00pm

Secretariat Background Note

Introduction

In 2020, the global community is facing the greatest health and human crisis since the creation of the UN in 75 years ago. The novel coronavirus is upending billions of lives across regions and is likely to push the global economy down to the worst recession since the Great Depression. The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated vulnerabilities and inequalities in both developing and developed countries, deepening poverty and exclusion and pushing the most vulnerable even further behind.

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, Member States committed to achieving sustainable development for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. They pledged to leave no one behind and endeavour to reach the furthest behind first. This pledge is firmly entrenched in the Sustainable Development Goals through the call that all targets to be reached by everyone. At the SDG Summit held in September 2019, Member States pledged to make the coming decade one of action and delivery.¹ The Decade of Action aspires to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, by accelerating global efforts to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty. It also pledges to ensure that no one is left behind, by taking more tangible steps to support people in vulnerable situations and the most vulnerable countries and to reach the furthest behind first.

Building on lessons learned from the current crisis, countries should craft strategies to “recover better” from the pandemic so as to get back on track to achieve the objectives of the 2030 Agenda, with leaving no one behind.

¹ A/RES/74/4



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Progress and challenges

Over the past decades, considerable progress has been made in economic and social development, but it has been uneven across and within countries and indicators.² While more than 700 million, or 10% of the world population, are left living in poverty,³ the pace of poverty reduction has slowed down in many regions, Global hunger is on the rise for the third year in a row, with more than 820 million people in the world still hungry today.⁴ Meanwhile, rapid urbanization, climate change, widening inequalities and inequitably distributed benefits of globalization have been undermining sustainable development.

The COVID-19 pandemic. -- a global health crisis -- is now turning into a multi-faceted social, economic and financial crisis, upending billions of lives across regions and destabilizing the global economy. Many of the gains made in the SDGs era are under threat, posing significant challenges to meeting the Goals set by the 2030 Agenda, especially for those countries with limited human and financial resources. Many more people are at risk of being further left behind.

COVID-19 crisis: impacts and recovery *(What COVID-19 is telling us about inequalities and the weaknesses in our social systems)*

The COVID-19 crisis is negatively impacting global efforts to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. The UN DESA forecasts that global output will contract by 3.2% in 2020. The World Bank further predicts poverty to rise across region, marking the first increase in global poverty since 1998, with an estimated 49 million additional people being pushed into extreme poverty in 2020.⁵ The crisis is affecting all countries across regions, but people living below or near the poverty line in the poorest regions are likely to be hit hardest. Preventive measures taken by many countries (e.g., social distancing and lockdowns)

² E/CN.5/2020/5. Note by the Secretariat on Twenty-five years of the World Summit for Social Development: addressing emerging societal challenges to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

³ United Nations, The Sustainable Development Report 2019

⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization (WHO), The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019: Safeguarding against Economic Slowdowns and Downturns (Rome, 2019).

⁵ The World Bank: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/impact-covid-19-coronavirus-global-poverty-why-sub-saharan-africa-might-be-region-hardest>.



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hit retail, trade, leisure and hospitality and transportation sectors, have affected sectors which employ a large portion of lower wage earners.⁶

The crisis also exacerbated existing inequalities in access to health care, quality education, food, drinking water, sanitation, social protection, adequate housing, technologies, especially ICTs, and employment/decent work.⁷

Recommendations for action: Mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress

Many countries have developed temporary/ad hoc measures to mitigate the health and socio-economic impact of the pandemic. However, more comprehensive medium- to long-term strategies and policies are needed to recover better and build resilience. Such strategies should not only ensure that no one is left behind, but also ensure that no one is pushed further behind.

Some individuals, groups and communities are particularly at risk of being left behind. While varying country to country, they include: children, youth, girls and women, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees, female-headed households, those who are unemployed, with low levels of education, people with low-wage jobs, working in the informal sector and engaged in precarious jobs without social protection, people living in rural and remote areas, people living in homelessness, confined in prisons, and without access to justice. The policies for recovering from the pandemic need to address the specific needs of these populations and enhance their participation in policymaking processes.

The COVID-19 crisis weakens Government's capacity to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The international community needs to support the response of countries in need, including fiscal stimulus, the extension of social protection coverage, and measures to address inequality and prevent people from falling into poverty. Protecting informal wage workers and self-employed in rural areas is also key to secure food supply chains.

⁶ UNDESA, Policy Brief N. 136: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/world-economic-situation-and-prospects-april-2020-briefing-no-136/>

⁷ UNDESA, Policy Brief N. 65: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-des-a-policy-brief-65-responses-to-the-covid-19-catastrophe-could-turn-the-tide-on-inequality/>



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Policy matters. Putting people at the centre of crisis response and recovery plan can lead to better, fairer and more resilient societies.

Guiding questions

- What did COVID-19 show us about our social and economic systems' ability to cope with shocks and their impact on the poorest and most vulnerable?
- How can we resume and accelerate progress towards SDGs while leaving no one behind, in particular by eradicating poverty and building more just, equitable and inclusive societies?
- What lessons have we learned from the implementation of the SDGs and the response to COVID-19 thus far? How can we take advantage of policies and measures already being introduced to implement the 2030 Agenda, to address systemic vulnerabilities and recover better towards more sustainable, just, equitable and inclusive societies?
- Which groups are especially vulnerable during and in recovering from the COVID-19 crisis? What are some promising actions to improve the situations of these groups and leave no one behind? How can we ensure that actions taken to respond to COVID-19 leave no one behind?
- What kind of mechanisms (i.e., early-warning systems, rapid response funds) are necessary to enable coordinated actions at global, regional and national levels and among all segment of society to mitigate risks and enhance resilience of individuals, groups and communities in vulnerable situations, amid the current crisis?