

Draft Wrap-Up Remarks, HLPF Week One

H.E. Ms. Marie Chatardová, President of ECOSOC

Conference room 4
Friday 13 July 2018
6:30 pm

Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I agree with you, Mr. Liu that this is a great meeting. We have heard where we are on all six SDGs, we have heard what we are doing to achieve them and we have learned from each other. I am heartened and encouraged that, throughout this intense week of debate and reflection, there was a palpable enthusiasm and continuing strong commitment to the 2030 Agenda. I am happy to enter our ministerial days on such a high note.

I will present more details at the opening of the high-level week this coming Monday. But I would like to offer a few of my own observations based on the reviews and discussions of this first week and to highlight some of the trends that have emerged.

Our task was to focus on assessing progress on six specific goals and the theme. But, throughout the entire week, we have seen yet again testimony of the indivisible, integrated and interlinked nature of all 17 SDGs.

We saw that the momentum around the 2030 Agenda remains strong. This was clear from your interventions and from the level of participation and engagement in our meeting overall.

It is critical to maintain the same level of energy, as we move to 2019, when the HLPF will meet not only in July but also in September under the auspices of the General Assembly.

This week, we heard about many areas of progress.

First, a declining share of people live below the poverty line and there is a lowering of maternal and child mortality.

Second, for the SDGs under review – on water, energy, cities, sustainable consumption and production, and terrestrial ecosystems – there was much good news to share. We heard some encouraging numbers for each of these Goals. The declining number of people living without electricity is one of them.

Third, there appears to have been widespread efforts to mainstream the SDGs into national development plans and strategies. This is accompanied by continuing policy and technological innovations in the SDGs we reviewed and more generally.

Fourth, many countries are working to ensure coherence among actions to implement the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, as well as other international agreements.

Fifth, disaggregated data and statistics are gaining ground, supporting better policy-making towards reaching those furthest behind.

But we have also heard about many challenges across the board.

Pockets of poverty persist in rural areas and social protection has yet to reach 4 billion people in 2016. The number of conflicts over the past decade has increased, leading to millions being displaced and driving food insecurity in 18 countries.

Too many people are unable to access safely managed sanitation services and safe drinking water. Competing pressures on land to urbanize, expand agriculture and provide for increasing populations are threatening natural sites, with land degradation threatening security and development.

There are other worrying trends, such as loss of species, urban pollution, limited access to clean cooking fuels or increasing levels of plastic pollution.

Major disparities in achievements exist, both within and between countries. The LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS continue to lag behind on almost all targets. Middle-income countries, for their part, face their own challenges, with large groups of people being excluded from opportunities to better the lives of their families.

Lower projections for sustainable economic growth and persistent patterns of inequality are cause for concern.

Certain populations remain at high risk of being left behind. Migratory flows are growing and the capacity to address the specific needs of migrants are under strain everywhere.

Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by disasters and conflict, especially when living in poverty. Many are still deprived of their basic rights.

Lack of official statistics, data and effective monitoring systems remain a significant challenge - despite the ongoing data revolution. Very few developing countries have fully funded statistical plans and a greater share of official development assistance (ODA) should be dedicated to statistics. As USG Liu reminded us, fulfilling the ambition of leaving no one behind without timely and disaggregated data is impossible.

Each of these challenges has hampered us in achieving our goals. We must continue to find alternative solutions for these cross-cutting challenges.

A clear message of this week is that solutions exist. There were countless examples of how the Agenda is being translated into concrete policies and measures. It seems new ways of making policies are taking root, with examples of more inclusive and evidence-based approaches. Science and technology hold the responses to many issues. We need to harness new technologies to advance the SDGs, while alleviating their negative impacts. The Global Sustainable Development Report will be an important tool to support the elaboration of policies guided by science and impact. Innovation is critical to chart the way towards the SDGs. We heard many ideas, such as the proposal to develop a technical or practical report as a result of the HLPF, the need for a UN high level event on water, ways to mobilize the business sector and the multiple examples our participants shared.

We also had a good look at the various SDGs.

We heard from many who spoke on SDG 6 on water that integrated water resources management is a solution for many challenges. It was illustrated by a number of examples and many success stories. Reducing inequalities in access to water, good governance, transparency and accountability of water systems are critical goals. Broad partnerships together with innovative financing sources and capacity building can change the world where currently billions of people lack access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. They can help address the grim facts that water scarcity is increasing, water quality is decreasing, and freshwater ecosystems are under threat. Political support is key for moving the implementation of the SDG6 and its related targets forward. There are multiple interlinkages with other goals, especially health, gender, cities, sustainable consumption and production as well as infrastructure and inequalities.

In energy, access to electricity increased by almost 10 per cent to 87 per cent. But much remains to be done to ensure that everyone has access to sustainable energy. We must be alert that some policies may hinder progress. We are doing more to accelerate access to modern energy technologies and to make energy systems smarter, more efficient and affordable. But we must accelerate the pace of transition. It is heartening that, in 2017, 17 countries generated more than 90 per cent of their electricity with renewable sources, but we need to do more by scaling-up investment in renewable energy production and lowering prices. Interlinkages to other goals, especially climate, gender, food security and infrastructure were underlined.

We heard from the United Nations Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, that the Goal on sustainable cities and communities will not be met unless each country develops and implements

human rights-based housing strategies. Half of humanity — 3.5 billion people — live in cities today, but an estimated 1.6 billion are inadequately housed and close to 900 million are living in informal settlements. We have also heard that half of the world's 1.3 million annual road fatalities and crashes occur in urban areas, with most of those deaths in low- and middle-income countries. This poses a heavy burden on national economies as well as households. But we have also heard of a number of policies and strategies that are being put to place to counter the major challenges we face, ranging from boosting housing affordability, controlling urban sprawl, ensuring easy access to public spaces – to using science, technology and innovation and partnerships to close gaps. Interlinkages to water, sanitation, energy, gender, infrastructure, health were underlined.

On sustainable consumption and production, we heard about decoupling economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation. Much is being done to achieve improved resource efficiency, while improving people's well-being. But all of us are still learning on how to make the kind of gains we need in sustainable consumption and production. Transitioning towards sustainable and resilient societies hinges on responsible management of finite resources. Currently 108 countries have national policies on sustainable consumption and production.

You shared mixed reports on our efforts to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss. And yet they are all essential for preservation of life on earth, including our own existence. We increasingly know how to make successful interventions in this area. We must do more.

We also heard about the challenges and opportunities that exist today for strengthening global partnership and enhancing the means of implementation. It was underlined by many that policy coherence and an enabling environment for sustainable development at all levels are essential. This provides an opportunity to focus policymaking and partnerships on addressing longer-standing concerns, and to accelerate the pace of progress towards the SDGs. The commitment of all development actors is needed to this end. We have the Addis Ababa Action Agenda as a framework as well as SDG17 and all its related targets. We know what to do for achieving debt sustainability or combating tax evasion and illicit flows. But efforts must be stepped up. We need to assess further what types of financing are needed to achieve different goals, which technologies are most suitable, and how to harness science and innovation to achieve positive results.

We also discussed the theme of this year's HLPF "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies" from different angles of least developed, landlocked and small island developing states as well as middle-income countries. Different countries and regions face different challenges. But many are confronted by a lack of resilience that impacts the most vulnerable.

This leads me to our last session this week, on leaving no one behind. The two rapporteurs recapitulated very well all the challenges that countries face if they want to find right policies and measures to reach the furthest behind and address vulnerability. We heard that many experience discrimination and exclusion. They suffer from worse health and education outcomes, face disadvantages in access to the labour market, experience poverty at disproportionately high rates, and many live in situation of extreme poverty and insecurity.

The negative impacts of globalization, climate change, and conflicts have been pushing more people towards such living conditions. However, examples were highlighted that showed it is possible to improve the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable. We can help them to take their fate into their own hands and take their place among development actors. Disaggregated data collection also allows to bring concrete instances of groups being left behind to the attention of policy-makers and the public. This, in turn, also allows to bring about policy changes through new legislation and awareness campaigns.

Excellencies,

One of my takeaways from this week is that, at the national and local level, the most inspiring change is taking place. WE were reminded that transformation toward sustainable and resilient societies is truly powered by citizens and their local authorities. They can sometimes implement changes in policy and legislation more quickly and effectively than their national level counterparts. But change is not easy. And nothing can replace the impact of national policies and action.

That brings me to next week, when 47 countries will tell us precisely what they have achieved, and what they are aspiring to achieve in their regions and communities.

So, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let us continue learning from each other's aspirations, achievements and difficulties also next week.

Let us ask ourselves what we are doing in our own countries, communities and families to reach the SDGs. But let us also fully use this global gathering in the HLPF.

We will continue our journey for a truly sustainable world together.

I would like to thank you for the expertise, knowledge and commitment that you have brought to our work. Your contributions and positive energy have infused the work of this Forum with a sense of inspiration and courage.

Have a good rest and see you all Monday.