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United Nations University (UNU) Summary Input for 2022 HLPF and ECOSOC

“Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”

- 1. Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17 from the vantage point of your organisation bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and tradeoffs.**

UNU institutes across the globe have identified progress, lessons learned, challenges, and impacts of the pandemic on implementation of the SDGs under review, including identifying interlinkages across the SDGs.

Research into inclusive green recovery/transitioning to green economies from the pandemic calls for a post-COVID-19 paradigm shift to re-orient economic systems that better align with the three dimensions of sustainable development, improve human wellbeing, and increase harmony between development nature. Five interrelated and interdependent building blocks have been identified to achieve a more inclusive green recovery: prosperity (SDGs 1, 2, 8 and 9), health (SDGs 3, 6), nature (SDGs 7, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15), justice (SDGs 4, 5, 10 and 16), and transformation (SDG 17).¹

More specifically, in relation to the SDGs under review, UNU’s research has revealed the following:

Education and the pandemic (SDG 4): Education is society’s greatest equaliser and a significant determinant of sustainable economic growth. Halting education exacerbates socio-economic and gender inequalities (SDGs 5, 10) within and between countries and negatively impacts future generations. Despite this, together with the evidence of negative direct and indirect effects on children and adolescents of closing schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries continue to keep schools closed even when there are clear World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations to the contrary. In 2021, UNU researchers developed policy briefs, calling on the G20 to develop a policy to reopen schools and close them only when recommended by the WHO and as a measure of last resort.² Further, the interlinkages between school closures on education, combined with the impact of COVID-19 on poverty reduction (SDG 1), food security (SDG 2) and good health and well-being (SDG 3) have led to estimates of current students expecting lower incomes over their lifetime than students attending schools, increasing income insecurity and lowering national GDP for affected countries.³

In terms of higher education institutions, the pandemic has raised questions about the relevance and viability of current university models, highlighted the drawbacks of narrowly focused academic disciplines, and put a spotlight on challenges of institutional governance both internal and external.⁴

¹ See Annex III (Inclusive Green Recovery Report)

² Allotey, Pascale, Liwanag, Harvy J, Rhule, Emma, Binagwaho, Agnes, Lehtimaki, Susanna and Schwalbe, Nina (2021). Access to Education During Public Health Emergencies: Keep Schools Open. TF1 – Global Health and Covid-19. Think20 Italy2021

³ See Annex IV

⁴ See Annex I



Gender and conflict management (SDG 5): Violent conflicts have not come to a halt during the current global pandemic but are instead being further complicated by it. People living in emergency settings are currently enduring a crisis within a crisis. While women's active participation in peace processes at all levels has been proven to be integral to the durability of peace agreements, they comprised only 6% of mediators, 6% of signatories, and 13% of negotiators in major peace processes between 1992 and 2019. Addressing the gender dimensions of conflict requires increasing women's participation in all facets of peacekeeping, including peace mediation, as well as inclusive, effective and gender responsive rule of law institutions to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies and advance gender equality.

Further, UNU's examination of how and why individuals exit armed conflict, evaluating the efficacy of interventions to support transition to civilian life, reveals a range of impacts that interventions have on children, women, and ethnic minorities.⁵ The data collected can enable UN partners to develop gender-transformative support for war-affected populations, those transitioning out of conflict, and thus improve the long-term trajectories of women and girls.

Life below and above (SDGs 14 and 15):

Environmental risks have increased as a result of COVID-19. Pandemic-generated demand and use of single plastics has increased plastic pollution both below the sea and above the land. Research reveals low-and-middle-income countries (LMICs) are more adversely affected given the high percentage of their populations that rely on fisheries and agricultural-based livelihoods. The pandemic has also reduced monitoring capacity of illegal exploitation of land and sea resources. Such impacts combine to increase risks posed by extreme weather events, reducing the resilience of affected communities.

There are **interlinkages between gender inequality and life below water and on land**. Women in the fishing and aquaculture sectors lack access to resources and are disproportionately represented in processing and marketing roles, which are often low-paying and precarious. Similarly, decision-making positions in the maritime industry are largely dominated by men, which limits the status of women. Moreover, only 13.8% of landholders are women globally, which reduces their ability to make critical decisions.⁶ UNU institutes have engaged in adapting recommendations to encourage policymakers to ensure equitable representation of women in all phases of landscape project development and implementation, promote recognition of women's rights and access to resources, and ensure that women receive the benefits equitably.

Life on the land includes the more than one billion people who live in **forest areas** around the world. Forests provide livelihoods, generate income through local, national, and global supply chains of products and are biodiversity hotspots that function as carbon sinks, keeping the Earth's climate stable. Yet, illegal logging and other environmental crimes have contributed to the loss of approximately 40 per cent of the planet's forests. In forest regions, like the Amazon, the Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the crisis by weakening social services and making local indigenous populations more vulnerable to land invasions by illegal miners, illegal loggers, and associated armed groups. To combat and reverse this trend, local and national efforts must be complemented with international cooperation.

⁵ See Annex II

⁶ UN Women and UN DESA, 2021



A project by UNU and partners to map global and regional governance arrangements on forests and other ecosystems, systemizing cooperation instruments that are part of international forest governance, aims to analyse the challenges and identify best practices related to existing frameworks for sustainable forestry management.⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic has also exposed significant flaws in critical **economic sectors in Africa**, revealing the reliance of African countries on the importance of food and agricultural inputs from outside of the continent. Lockdowns and restrictions have disrupted supply chains, limiting access to critical agricultural inputs for farmers. UNU's research finds government measures to alleviate the impact of the pandemic on residents and businesses have mixed results, with a lack of a gendered approach, greater attention paid to some sectors over others, and the neglect of informal workers who make up a large part of workforces in the region.⁸

Within the UN system, **UN Resident Coordinators (RCs)** have been at the forefront of the organisation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, rallying UN capacity to support government response and recovery. The existential threat from the interlinked effects of climate change, biodiversity loss & pollution (SDGs 13, 14 and 15), the Triple Planetary Crisis, presents an even greater challenge for humanity, requiring radical change to approaches to development, well-being, and growth. RCs perform a crucial role in the international multilateral system's response to this crisis, helping to bolster national-level actions that can coalesce into meaningful changes at the global level. UNU's engagement with RCs has identified common obstacles they face to meet this challenge and considers good practices and models that could help them become even more effective actors around the world.⁹

While the pandemic has certainly highlighted challenges for meeting SDGs 14 and 15, it has also provided **opportunities** in some areas. UNU's research in Africa¹⁰ shows some small businesses in the energy sector taking advantage of digital technologies to maintain staff and maintain relevance in the sector, while other communities consider the pandemic an opportunity to move toward more sustainable living in harmony with nature – landscape and seascape approaches¹¹ to policy formulation. This would require a shift in mindsets about the interaction between life, nature, production, consumption, and new business practices.

Stronger cooperation (SDG 17): The 2030 agenda emphasises a transformation of global development and a “win–win” cooperation based on an integrated approach and equal relationships among member states, as well as coherent, comprehensive, and inclusive responses for development issues and challenges. Partnering for the SDGs requires the government to move away from its traditional ways of working to engaging more with non-state actors such as consulting in policymaking or contracting for policy implementation. Multi-stakeholder research projects conducted by UNU are often co-designed and involve partnerships with UN entities, national, local, and regional governments, the private including the financial sector, philanthropic individuals/associations, other academic institutions, NGOs and civil society. Projects¹² on financing against slavery and trafficking and managing exits from armed

⁷ See Annex II

⁸ See Annex V

⁹ See Annex II

¹⁰ See Annex V

¹¹ See Annex I

¹² See Annexes I and II



conflicts to research on the progress of subnational localisation of the SDGs, demonstrate that multi-level partnerships can become tangible instruments to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

2. Assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “leaving no one behind” against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, within the respective areas addressed by your organisation;

Numerous UNU institutes pivoted their research focus in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, contributing to the better understanding and assessment of the impact of the pandemic on the principle of “leaving no one behind.” UNU’s research has revealed:

Climate action: The climate crisis has imposed unprecedented risks for economies and societies worldwide, with a particular peril for the most vulnerable countries. The COVID-19 pandemic has added complexity to future scenarios, as the economic downturn it sparked has led to a sharp increase in poverty and an intensification of global inequalities. To ensure the equitable conditions for countries to move together towards transition, it is necessary to provide developing countries increased means to enhance and implement: financial resources, institutional capacities to take action, technology and scientific knowledge. By doing so, no member state will be left behind, contributing to the ultimate goal of climate action.

Green recovery: The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed a need to re-orient the economic system. Aligning the development model with the Future We Want and improving human wellbeing in a tangible and valuable way - are among the main goals of green recovery initiatives conducted by UNU. Having a harmonious relationship between human development and nature becomes a vital component to achieve this recovery and requires the active involvement of people as its primary beneficiaries as well as active involvement and alignment of the activities of the public sector, financial sector, and private enterprises. Active cooperation of these actors in a knowledge-based way is essential to achieving prosperity, health, fulfilment of human rights for all people.¹³ Further, transitioning away from hydrocarbons and fossil fuels impacts numerous communities depending on these sectors for their livelihoods. This transition potentially exacerbates existing inequalities related to energy poverty, demand, supply, access, and distribution, particularly for informal workers. UNU’s research into greening the informal sector in Africa can provide a pathway for policymakers to better respond to challenges of the transition.¹⁴

Migrants: One of the groups of people that have been severely affected due to lockdowns imposed by governments in response to the pandemic are migrants. Research investigating the impact of COVID-19 on migrants’ wellbeing and mental health a range of regions found many ended up homeless due to their eviction from accommodation provided by their employing industries. Further research is being undertaken to examine how the overall COVID-19 response in developing countries has impacted the mental health and wellbeing of migrant labourers and how shocks to migrant livelihoods have impacted their wellbeing.

Indigenous communities: The COVID-19 pandemic has asymmetrically impacted indigenous communities, who are at higher risk of discrimination and of being left without support to defend themselves peoples from intensifying rights violations which have occurred during the pandemic. New

¹³ See Annex III

¹⁴ See Annex V



confinement measures and restrictions on the right to freedom of movement have exacerbated these challenges. UNU's research has revealed the importance of fostering human rights literacy among indigenous populations, as well as the need for better capacity-building in non-formal settings and strengthening the accessibility to basic services for indigenous populations both at home and on the move.¹⁵

Slavery and human trafficking: The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the pressing need to mobilise the financial sector to better protect and support the most vulnerable in our global economy, in particular people suffering from modern slavery and human trafficking. Solid evidence base about what really works in policymaking is deemed essential to address the inhumane practices happening in different corners of the globe.¹⁶

Artificial intelligence (AI): New technologies, such as digital technology, machine learning, and artificial intelligence (AI), are widely believed to facilitate realisation of the SDGs. AI technology is already having a great impact in many areas, especially the manufacturing sector, making it possible to exploit the full potential in the manufacturing industry by achieving a higher level of adaptability, efficiency, and robustness, while taking a human centric approach can enhance social value and human wellbeing.¹⁷

3. Actions and policy recommendations in areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the implementation of the SDGs under review;

UNU Institutes have identified areas which require urgent attention and suggest the following recommendations in relation to the SDGs under review:

SDG 4: Educational equality¹⁸:

Poverty: while technology and digital platforms play an important role in supporting e-learning activities during COVID-19, it is not equally supporting of all learners. The advantages of technological development have mostly benefited the wealthiest in society, while poorer communities have failed to engage in educational activities during the pandemic period. This persistent digital and technical divide between communities has amplified gaps in educational development. Achieving the SDGs, particularly SDG 4, needs to overcome barriers to more equitable digitalisation

The role of Higher Education: given the impact of the pandemic on the world's educational institutions, there is a need to redefine the role of higher education institutions (HEI) in terms of redesigning and transforming this sector. This requires the cultivation of systems thinking (analysing complex systems across environmental, social, and economic domains), the development of more innovative models of learning, and also elevating the role of HEIs in building back better by informing evidence-based policy making. Further, incorporating traditional knowledge and skills can contribute to realising sustainable development as well as fostering future leaders.

¹⁵ See Annex II

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ <https://ias.unu.edu/en/research/advancing-collaboration-and-exchange-of-knowledge-between-the-eu-and-japan-for-ai-driven-innovation-in-manufacturing-eu-japan-ai.html#outline>

¹⁸ See Annex I for more details of UNU-IAS recommendations for this indicator



SDG 5: Gender equality: The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the expansion of telehealth and digital applications for contact tracing, surveillance, vaccine registrations, and certification. However, despite the rapid proliferation of digital tools and services, significant challenges remain in ensuring women's meaningful use of digital technology in their lives and society. The digital gender gap has the potential to exacerbate existing health inequities. Closing the digital gender gap requires a multifaceted approach to address all the intersectional inequalities faced by women and girls from diverse backgrounds including establishing more inclusive and gender responsive education and digital training to focus on the specific needs of women, addressing harmful practices that hinder women's meaningful use of digital technology, and developing policies that support women to stay online.¹⁹

Women's active participation in peace processes is integral to the durability of peace agreements. To ensure that women are better represented in formal mediation processes, UNU's research²⁰ has called for the inclusion and gender sensitivity in selection criteria, building of relationships and collaborations among women mediator networks, and the diversification of financing for women's peace groups.²¹ Further, the UN Security Council has also recognized that gender-responsive rule of law institutions are integral to the maintenance of international peace and security. To ensure future UN interventions on rule of law are strengthened by the full integration of gender considerations, one UNU project on the rule of law and sustaining peace²² recommends UN interventions and programming should be informed by a country-specific gender analysis, fully integrate gender considerations across all aspects, including budget and monitoring and evaluation framework, and to address the financing gap, by stepping-up efforts to fund gender equality-focused rule of law programming.

SDGs 14 and 15: Life Below Water and on Land:

In socio-ecological production landscapes and seascapes (SEPLS) around the world, a landscape approach results in high resilience with strong socio-cultural and communal ties and self-sufficiency in natural resource use. This approach helps to overcome shocks caused by the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. Policy recommendations²³ to build back better include incorporating SEPLS approaches in policies, building on resilience assessments in management, prioritising issues of equity, capitalising on building back better as an opportunity to change mindsets and perceptions towards living in harmony with nature, as well as incorporating traditional knowledge and skills to create more resilient societies.

SDG 17: Local, National and Regional cooperation: The COVID-19 pandemic made countries realise the interdependence between each other after closing borders (migration, cross-border trade, and tourism), and locking down. The pandemic provides an opportunity to rethink the critical role of cooperation between different countries in managing the crisis.

At the subnational level, the pandemic's socio-economic impacts have affected the progress of local and regional governments on SDGs localisation, particularly in terms of governance, finance, and action

¹⁹ <https://www.genderhealthhub.org/articles/the-digital-gender-gap-in-healthcare-progress-challenges-and-policy-implications/>

²⁰ See Annex II project on Gender and Peace Mediation

²¹ See Annex II

²² See Annex II project on Rule of Law and Sustaining Peace

²³ See Annex I



towards attaining the SDGs. Priorities for national and subnational governments to overcome these impacts include ensuring coherent policy, through multi-level and cross sector coordination, and horizontal cooperation, pursuing resilient, inclusive and green subnational financing, and accelerating SDGs localisation to achieve inclusive, sustainable, and resilient recovery.

4. Policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda;

Policy recommendations to promote a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery as suggested by UNU institutes, in addition to the above, include:

Nature-based solutions: Work by UNU and the World Food Programme (WFP) has revealed a need for greater integration of nature-based solutions into adaptation planning. There is interconnectivity of disasters around the world, which make it clear that interconnected solutions, such as nature-based solutions, deserve more attention. However, the potential to utilise nature-based solutions is still largely untapped and to develop to their full potential will need to be designed as integrated solutions and in combination with other safety nets²⁴.

Transitioning to a Green Economy: To transition to a green economy, the coordination of public and private sectors, governments, with support from the UN, is required to pursue the following strategies for a green recovery:

- long-term and transformative commitments to a green economy are needed,
- the establishment of clear timelines for achieving net-zero emissions,
- providing financial and technological assistance for green recovery to emerging and developing economies,
- closing the inequality gap within and between nations, including targeting the green informal sector, and
- involving those countries in the decision-making process at the regional/global levels.

Further, to have a more comprehensive evaluation of the “quality” of progress in green recovery and achieving the SDGs requires an integrated assessment framework that can holistically examine the interdependencies and interrelated dynamics of green recovery building blocks and the SDGs. Developing such a framework based on a Resource Nexus Approach²⁵ must be one of the top priorities of future efforts to facilitate green recovery in accordance with the SDGs.

SDGs & National policies:

Achieving the SDGs and the transformation required by the 2030 Agenda hinges on effective national policies and national development plans play a critical role in the policymaking process. To accelerate localisation of the SDGs national planning must be aligned with the SDGs through improving the

²⁴ See Annex IV for more details from UNU-EHS

²⁵ The Nexus Approach to environmental resources management examines the interrelatedness and interdependencies of environmental resources and their transitions and fluxes across spatial scales and between compartments. Instead of just looking at individual components, the functioning, productivity, and management of a complex system are taken into consideration.



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policymaking process, removing systemic barriers, and engaging diverse stakeholders to innovate and sustain change. More specifically, such policies should:

- Harness the SDGs as an opportunity to promote national goal-setting processes and influence domestic policymaking.
- Use the SDGs as a platform to mainstream sustainable development principles in national policymaking.
- Strengthen national development planning by promoting approaches relevant to the SDGs.
- Position human, social, environmental, economic, and institutional objectives at the same level.
- Ensure inclusive participation and effective stakeholder engagement in implementing the 2030 Agenda and national development plans.

5. Key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2022 HLPF from UNU include.

- **Partnerships and cooperation:** The COVID-19 pandemic adds complexity to future scenarios. SDGs covered thus far can only be realised with strong global partnerships and cooperation. There continues to be a need to establish and strength successful cooperation at the local, regional and global level.
- **The pandemic expands the inequality in the society:** persistent inequalities, whether in terms of wealth, power, opportunity, or treatment, inevitably contribute to societal instability and non-sustainability. Non-discriminatory governance and social justice are prerequisites for ensuring the SDG pledge of “leaving no one behind” regarding physical security and access to education, healthcare, and employment.
- **Developing Nature-based solutions:** the interconnectivity of disasters around the world, making it clear that interconnected solutions - nature-based solutions - deserve more attention. Nature-based solutions not only address climate change, they also reduce disaster risk, biodiversity loss and food insecurity in an integrated way.



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Annex I

UNU Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS), Japan

Institute Input for 2022 HLPF and ECOSOC

I. Key Messages on SDG 4 — Quality Education

COVID-19 has had deep impacts on the world's educational institutions. The UNU Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS) highlights the following messages focusing on the higher education sector, drawn from its research and policy dialogue activities — including a survey in 15 countries in the Asia-Pacific.

Main Issues

- The pandemic has raised questions about the relevance and viability of the current university model and prompted reflection on its incompatibility with sustainability.
- COVID-19 revealed that we can no longer afford to think and act in siloes. The narrow focus of academic disciplines contributed to the chaotic, ad-hoc responses to COVID-19 from many sectors of society.
- Higher education faces deep challenges brought about by the pandemic, for institutional governance (university management, changes to teaching, learning and research), and external governance (mobility and collaboration).

Policy Recommendations

- **Redefine the role of higher education:** various measures have been taken to ensure the continuity of education (e.g., increasing online content, hybrid education). But a complete shift of mindset is needed, to redesign and transform higher education, develop alternative educational narratives and support curriculums to address pre-existing sustainability challenges.
- **Cultivate systems thinking:** facing unprecedented circumstances, systems thinking is needed more than ever — the ability to analyse complex systems across environmental, social, and economic domains. This will be crucial in building back better.
- **Elevate the role of the academic community in building back better:** the academic community has a key role to play by informing evidence-based policymaking and educating future generations. For example, it can mobilise interdisciplinary knowledge to strengthen the case for sustainable land and water management as a means of building resilient communities and improving people's lives. Academic insights can warn against short-term economic planning that would exacerbate unsustainable land use & deforestation. The academic community should encourage governments to enhance synergies between SDGs.
- **Further the innovation and new opportunities created by the response to the pandemic:** a wide range of new and innovative models have been developed, including international and collaborative online learning. Universities have modified their offerings, incorporating blended/hybrid education and “internationalisation at home” to enable the flexible and diversified qualitative learning that is needed to advance sustainable development.



- **Incorporate traditional knowledge and skills:** education should provide opportunities to learn about local traditional knowledge and skills and systems of local production for local consumption that contribute to realising sustainable development. This will contribute to fostering future leaders and supporters of a resilient society that can flexibly respond to a global systemic collapse such as the one we experienced in the COVID-19 pandemic. Such efforts will also contribute to achieving other goals such as SDG 14 and SDG 15.

II. Key messages on SDGs 14 and 15

In socio-ecological production landscapes and seascapes (SEPLS) around the world, a landscape approach results in high resilience with strong socio-cultural and communal ties and self-sufficiency in natural resource use. This approach helps to overcome shocks caused by the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNU-IAS highlights the following messages based on the institute's research, including a survey conducted in April 2021 among members of the International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative.²⁶

Main Issues

- Efforts towards sustainability have been hindered by several, primarily socio-economic, challenges including disruptions to social gatherings and interactions, reductions to market access and income opportunities, and school closures.
- The impacts of the crisis have been greater on the most vulnerable sectors of society (the less affluent, women, etc.), including lack of access to internet infrastructure and increased gender-based violence.
- Communities see the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to move toward more sustainable living in harmony with nature, which would entail changing mindsets and perceptions about ways of life, nature, production and consumption, and new ways of conducting business.

Policy Recommendations

- **Incorporate landscape and seascape approaches in policies:** these approaches are valuable tools in the new paradigm to conserve and restore the planet. Build back better policies should incorporate SEPLS management to minimise trade-offs and maximise synergies for sustainable development. This could ensure progress on equitable and sustainable use of natural resources and enhance community resilience.
- **Build on resilience assessments in management:** these include trade-off analysis using knowledge of health and well-being, ecosystems, and people. They are carried out repeatedly to ensure and enhance adaptive management and mobilise resources. They foster social capital by bonding, bridging, and linking people to accelerate recovery from shocks, minimise suffering, and promote prevention.

²⁶ IPSI is a network comprising over 270 member organisations across the globe dedicated to realising societies in harmony with nature. UNU-IAS hosts the secretariat of the network.



- **Prioritise issues of equity:** communities, especially marginalised ones, face tremendous challenges caused by the pandemic, closely linked to unprecedented biodiversity loss. Addressing these shared challenges requires accelerating international cooperation to enhance equity.
- **Capitalise on building back better as an opportunity to change mindsets and perceptions towards living in harmony with nature:** moving away from unsustainable lifestyles and adopting new ways of conducting business should be central to an SDGs-driven response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This opportunity should be fully utilised to impact the eight leverage points of transformative change identified in the IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.²⁷
- **Incorporate local traditional knowledge and skills to build back better:** successful integration of local knowledge and systems of local production and consumption is key to promoting a sustainable society. Combined with modern technology, it will help to create a resilient society that can respond in a flexible and timely manner to global systemic shocks such as the one we experienced in the COVID-19 pandemic.

III. Key Messages on SDG 17 — Partnerships for the Goals

The COVID-19 crisis has had adverse socioeconomic impacts on subnational governments (local and regional), affecting their progress on SDGs localisation. These impacts have varied substantially in terms of governance, finance, and actions towards attaining the SDGs. UNU-IAS has identified several key issues and policy recommendations. These are drawn from the report *COVID-19 and Progress on Subnational Localisation of the SDGs*, produced in collaboration with United Cities and Local Governments Asia-Pacific in September 2021.²⁸ The report is based on survey research engaging 52 regional and local governments in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, conducted in February 2021.

Main Issues

Key challenges and opportunities facing subnational governments include:

- Vertical and horizontal coordination mechanisms across levels and sectors are recognised by subnational governments to have a critical function in responding to the COVID-19 crisis.
- Severity of finances is perceived differently across different city types (i.e., small, medium, metropolitan) in their short and medium-term finances, while the socioeconomic crisis linked to COVID-19 has had adverse impacts on subnational governments' finances.
- Subnational governments underline shifting priorities in overcoming the health crisis as the main challenge of localising the SDGs during the COVID-19 crisis.

²⁷ <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>. The eight leverage points are: (1) Visions of a good life, (2) Total consumption and waste, (3) Latent values of responsibility, (4) Inequalities, (5) Justice and inclusion in conservation, (6) Externalities from trade and other telecouplings, (7) Responsible technology, innovation and investment, and (8) Education and knowledge generation and sharing.

²⁸ UNU-IAS and UCLG ASPAC 2021, COVID-19 and Progress on Subnational Localisation of the SDG, <https://ias.unu.edu/en/news/news/report-identifies-priorities-for-subnational-governments-to-overcome-covid-19-and-accelerate-sdgs-localisation.html>



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- SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 3 (good health and well-being), and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) are identified as the areas of high priority for implementation.

Policy Recommendations

The following should be priorities for national and subnational governments, and other stakeholders working to overcome the impacts of COVID-19 and accelerate SDGs localisation:

- **Ensure coherent policy and governance to build back better:** through multi-level and cross sector coordination to manage impacts of the pandemic; horizontal cooperation between subnational governments and with non-state actors; and national recovery strategies that manage the differentiated impacts of COVID-19.
- **Pursue resilient, inclusive, and green subnational finance:** introduce financial management measures and fiscal tools to reduce imbalances at the subnational level and restore fiscal stability; increase transparency and accountability; and establish a funding mechanism for multi-year green recovery.
- **Accelerate SDGs localisation to achieve inclusive, sustainable, and resilient recovery:** align short-term responses with longer-term objectives by internalising the SDGs and other international frameworks; adopt SDGs-related approaches to support subnational government strategies; and accelerate digitalisation of services.



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UNU Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR), USA

Institute Input for 2022 HLPF and ECOSOC

Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17

SDG 5

Gender and Peace Mediation: A [UNU-CPR report](#), *Inclusion and Gender Sensitivity for Effective Peace Mediation*, shows that women's inclusion and gender sensitivity in peace mediation are inseparable but not interchangeable. Understanding the difference between these two goals is key to developing targeted approaches to ensure that peace mediation processes not only consider a diversity of perspectives and enable the participation of underrepresented groups but also, critically, that the substantive outcome of peace mediation address the gendered legacies of conflict in order to build more equitable societies. The report concludes with a series of targeted recommendations for intergovernmental organizations, policymakers and government officials, donors, peace mediators and mediator networks, civil society organizations, and researchers, touching on areas of future engagement for each type of stakeholder and partnership between them.

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration: The [Evolution of Inclusion: Three Decades of Policies and Programmes to Manage Exits from Armed Groups in Colombia](#) looks at the history of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) policy and programming in Colombia and derives lessons learned that can be applied elsewhere. It examines how international and national factors (including the work of the UN) have influenced the design and implementation of relevant interventions in Colombia; how policy and programmatic decision-making have served the goal of conflict resolution in the country; and what the impact of these factors and decisions has been on children, women, and ethnic minorities within the population of individuals formerly associated with armed groups. Related Findings Report based on real-time community-level surveys on gender and peacebuilding in Nigeria and Columbia include: [Data Points on Gender Norms and Sexism in and Around Maiduguri](#) and [The Gendered Dynamics of Conflict and Peacebuilding in Colombia](#), also offering key policy and programmatic implications of these findings.

Rule of Law: A key finding of the [Rule of Law and Sustaining Peace](#) project is that the rule of law is gendered in a number of important and interrelated ways: women experience conflict in very different ways than men and face gendered obstacles in access to justice and inclusion in broader peace processes; laws often discriminate against women and put them at an economic disadvantage compared to men. There is a relationship between gender inequality in a society and resilience to and prevention of conflict. Therefore, addressing the gender dimensions of conflict – including through inclusive, effective and gender-responsive rule of law institutions – is essential to building peaceful and inclusive societies, and advancing SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 16 on peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

Modern slavery: 71% of people living in conditions of modern slavery, human trafficking, forced labour and child labour are women and girls. UNU-CPR's Finance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAST) initiative launched a training certificate in 2020 with ACAMS, the global anti-money laundering and financial



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crime association. In 2021, FAST introduced a [second certificate](#) with ACAMS on sexual exploitation, which disproportionately impacts women and girls.

Thought leadership: UNU-CPR has also undertaken thought leadership on gender equality including on [women in peace talks](#), [climate and the Women, Peace and Security agenda](#); the [Security Council and women's rights](#), and [COP26 and gender equality](#), among others.

SDG 14 and SDG 15

Triple Planetary Crisis: At the global Resident Coordinator Retreat in 2020, Resident Coordinators suggested having more regular in-depth exchanges with their peers on specific thematic areas of importance to their work. They proposed quarterly 'deep-dives', with the first focusing on the nature, climate change, and pollution triple crisis and the role of the UN development system in responding to such threats. The UN Development Coordination Office (DCO) commissioned UNU-CPR to provide future-oriented recommendations to tackle the Triple Planetary Crisis) following the deep-dive, which the Centre carried out in partnership with UNU-INRA. The resulting report, [Beyond Opportunism: The UN Development System's Response to the Triple Planetary Crisis](#), was then distributed to all Resident Coordinators and its recommendations were presented to a group of Resident Coordinator Offices at a workshop in early summer 2021. This led to a [new project](#) funded by the UK Mission to the UN that builds off of that report, looking at stress-testing the Resident Coordinator system's regional reforms and their capacity to advance the UN's prevention agenda.

Forest Governance: A recent [project](#) done in collaboration between UNU-CPR and [Plataforma CIPÓ](#) – a women-led think tank based in Brazil and dedicated to issues of climate, governance and peacebuilding – has mapped global and regional governance arrangements on forests and other ecosystems relevant to biodiversity and climate change. The purpose of this mapping is to systematize cooperation instruments that form part of international forest governance and, thus, to offer inputs for analyses of challenges and best practices related to the existing frameworks for the preservation and the sustainable management of forest resources. In addition, UNU-CPR [published a report](#) tracing the history of forestry protection in global governance over the past forty years, this policy brief contextualizes the importance of the Glasgow Declaration on Forests and Land Use at COP26 that outlines five recommendations for policymakers to take forward the commitments in the Declaration.

SDG 17

UNU-CPR's approach to its programming is one of co-design and collaboration, as can be seen from its numerous multi-stakeholder projects. For example:

Finance Against Slavery & Trafficking is in its third phase, following the foundations laid by the Financial Sector Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking as well as the first phase of FAST that aimed to promote awareness and drive implementation of its seminal *Blueprint for Mobilizing Finance Against Slavery and Trafficking*. Its partners currently include: The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Office for Foreign Affairs of the Principality of Liechtenstein, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Luxembourg, LGT Venture Philanthropy, the Liechtenstein Bankers Association, Humanity United, Tarom Foundation and Stiftung Fürstlicher Kommerzienrat Guido Feger. It works closely with partners and stakeholders around the world, including through its Survivor Inclusion Initiative that supports survivor reintegration into the financial system.



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Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) is supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Irish Aid, and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and is run in partnership with the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO), UNICEF, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the World Bank. It works closely with local research partners in Colombia and Nigeria (Innovations for Poverty Action, Mobukar Consultancy, and Fundación Conflict Responses) as well as UN in-country teams. The project is now expanding to Iraq, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger and likewise work with partners on the ground to both benefit its research while providing capacity-building and access to the UN system to such partners. Its Findings Reports are based on community-level surveys and provide key policy findings on thematic areas. See in particular on COVID-19, [Armed Group Messaging on COVID-19 in Nigeria](#) and [Armed Groups, and Public Health Perceptions in Colombia](#).

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Indigenous Rights Literacy: A new joint initiative with UNU-CPR and members of the UK Research and Innovation-funded Life Facing Deportation Project is examining existing practices that foster rights literacy among indigenous populations and consider ways that capacity-building in non-formal settings can be created, strengthened, and made more accessible to indigenous populations at home and on the move, which has been exacerbated by COVID-19. The consortium includes the Mexican National Council of Science and Technology, El Colegio de Sonora in Hermosillo, Mexico, and the Centre for the Study of Equity and Governance in Health Systems (CEGSS) in Guatemala. This project will publish its first report in March 2022.



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Annex III

UNU Institute for Integrated Management of Material Fluxes and of Resources (UNU-FLORES), Germany

Institute Input for 2022 HLPF and ECOSOC

UNU-FLORES members made fundamental contributions (one as the lead author and one as the UNU focal point) to the [Inclusive Green Recovery Report](#) published recently by the UN EMG.

The [Inclusive Green Recovery Report](#) calls for a post-COVID-19 paradigm shift that re-orienting the economic system in order to:

- align the development model with the **Future We Want** and improve human wellbeing in a tangible and evaluable way;
- increase the harmony of the relationship between human development and nature.

Prosperity (SDG1, SDG2, SDG8, and SDG9), Health (SDG3 and SDG6), Nature (SDG7, SDG11, SDG12, SDG13, SDG14, and SDG15), Justice (SDG4, SDG5, SDG10 and SDG16) and Transformation (SDG17) are the five interrelated and interdependent building blocks of an Inclusive Green Recovery. Achieving a green recovery must be facilitated by the active involvement and alignment of the activities of the public sector, financial sector, and private enterprises to promote investment in five priority areas (recommended by the experts involved in the consultative process):

- clean energy;
- natural capital
- buildings and energy efficiency;
- transportation, and
- R&D, education and connectivity.

The following strategies – utilized in the quest of green recovery – have been enabled through the coordination of its actors and the support from the UN:

- Making long-term and transformative commitments to green economy
- Establishing clear timelines for achieving net-zero emissions
- Providing financial and technological assistance for green recovery to the emerging and developing economies
- Closing the inequality gap within and between nations

Green recovery requires a paradigm shift and introducing a new approach to enhancing both human wellbeing and its relationship with nature, in such a way that makes the economic system and governance institutions more transparent, accountable and resilient, distributes the fruits of development in a more inclusive fashion (addressing the inequalities between and within nations), and disincentivizes activities that cause damage to the environment (e.g., climate change and biodiversity loss), and threaten the health of citizens. This new paradigm facilitates economic growth that is environmentally sustainable, as it does not consider economic growth as the sole or the most important objective of human activities and policy making.



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For building back better, we require revisiting the definitions and frameworks we use to assess development, human wellbeing, and the success of nations. To evaluate our success in moving toward the Future We Want, we need a set of indicators that helps us holistically assess all building blocks of green recovery. The global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a potentially suitable framework for assessing and comparing the success of nations in building back better, increasing the harmony between human and nature, and achieving targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that reflect the Future We Want. Yet, comprehensive evaluation of the “quality” of progress in green recovery and achieving the SDGs is still a challenging task in the absence of an **integrated assessment framework that can holistically examine the interdependencies and interrelated dynamics of green recovery building blocks and the SDGs.**

Developing such a framework based on a **Resource Nexus Approach** must be one of the top priorities of future efforts to facilitate green recovery in accordance with the SDGs:

- The Nexus Approach to the sustainable management of water, soil, and waste integrates environmental management and governance across sectors and scales. This approach is based on the understanding that **environmental resources are inextricably intertwined**. Considering their mutual dependencies in environmental management may therefore increase overall resource efficiency, and ensure equitable benefit sharing. In addition, reducing the use of resources, recycling of resources, and reuse of resources is at the core of the Nexus Approach. Taking a Nexus Approach for environmental resources may help to decrease environmental risks and ecological scarcities under conditions of global change as well as to ensure economic development.

The Resource Nexus concept has been increasingly discussed in engineering, natural and social sciences, resulting in the existence of manifold understandings and uses. While a basic understanding of the concept exists and is widely used in research and practice, the concept is hardly operationalised. This hinders the analysis of the conditions (e.g., participation, governance) and effects (e.g., sustainability) of implementing a Nexus Approach to the sustainable management of environmental resources.

Embedded within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UNU-FLORES’s initiatives on the Resource Nexus pave the way towards:

- a concise and empirically substantiated understanding of the Resource Nexus among scientists and the wider community of experts
- integration of Resource Nexus concepts in policy design and implementation
- a community of practice – cutting across academia, policy, practice, and civil society – on the sustainable management of environmental resources

Going beyond water, soil, and waste, the Resource Nexus includes all relevant environmental resources, including energy and other geo-resources, as well as biodiversity.



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Annex IV

UNU Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS), Germany

Institute Input for 2022 HLPF and ECOSOC

Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17

The setbacks that COVID-19 poses for progress across all 17 SDGs, particularly in recognition of their interlinked nature, remain hard to quantify or predict, though it is evident that it is in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) where these challenges are of greatest concern. Many of these countries are still struggling to implement SDG monitoring frameworks at the sub-national level, meaning that the capacity to track the impact of the pandemic on SDG progress, particularly on remote or disadvantaged groups, is limited. Through the UNU-EHS Flagship Report - Interconnected Disaster Risks, we explored how COVID-19 was interconnected with disasters around the world, particularly as a co-driver of exposure and vulnerability, and how the strain on public infrastructure exacerbated the impact of extreme events. In relation to the particular SDGs in question some points include:

SDG 4: Impacts on SDG 1 on poverty reduction, SDG 2 on food security and SDG 3 on good health and well-being are the easiest to quantify, however through interlinkages and direct closures under COVID-19 restrictions, the effect on education (SDG 4) has potentially long-lasting impacts for students and their countries. Estimates suggest that globally students in grades 1–12 affected by the closures might expect some three per cent lower income over their entire lifetimes, resulting in an average of 1.5 per cent lower annual GDP in affected nations for the remainder of the century.

SDGs 14 and 15 (in relation to environmental risk): plastic pollution has skyrocketed as a result of the pandemic-generated demand and use of single use plastic (e.g., some estimates attribute over 25,000 tons of extra plastic material entering the global ocean). Again, this adversely affects LMICs, many of which have higher percentages of the population reliant on fisheries and agriculture-based livelihoods, or where ecosystems are already under severe threat due to pollution, land-use change and climate change impacts. In addition, there is evidence of another grave threat to conservation on land and sea - illegal exploitation - flourishing under the reduction in monitoring capacity brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. These impacts combine to increase risks posed by extreme weather events, which are increasing in distribution and intensity with climate change, and reduce resilience for those in their path.

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Assessments of SDG implementation in partner countries suggests that progress in regions with high levels of socio-economic challenge, disadvantaged and remote communities remains a challenge, and that the restrictions due to the COVID-19 have led to impacts on livelihoods that have further exacerbated this challenge. In other words: those that were being left behind are now further behind.

Actions and policy recommendations in areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the implementation of the SDGs under review;



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The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the systemic risks inherent in our public systems and infrastructure. In order to ensure more resilient SDGs we recommend:

Increased scope for nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based adaptation measures to protect ecosystems and people, building resilience to both natural and biological hazards. The benefits of this approach would interlink across all 17 SDGs.



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Annex V

UNU Institute for National Resource in Africa (UNU-INRA), The Ghana Institute Input for 2022 HLPF and ECOSOC

Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17

Covid-19, food, farms and energy efficiency in Africa (COFFEE)- SDG 5, 15, 17

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has exposed significant flaws in critical economic sectors in Africa. For example, it has revealed the undue reliance of African countries on importation of food and agricultural inputs from outside the continent, with lockdowns and restrictions disrupting supply chains within and between countries and limiting access to critical agricultural inputs for farmers. These obvious challenges notwithstanding, COVID-19 also presents a golden opportunity for African countries to reconsider their current growth trajectory and pursue a green and inclusive development agenda that is hinged on large scale adoption of green and sustainable technologies. In line with this, UNU-INRA received funding from the German Environment Agency to conduct a study on the impact of COVID-19 on the food and energy sectors in Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal and examine the level and scale of adoption of green and sustainable technologies in these sectors. Government's COVID-19 recovery plans and policies were reviewed to determine the specific provisions governments have made to support the adoption of green and sustainable technologies through entrepreneurship in the food and energy sectors. Some of the findings from the report on Senegal revealed that:

The government has not developed any strategic document for COVID-19 recovery.

Measures or interventions were introduced to alleviate the impact on residents (waiver of electricity and water bills) and businesses (cash support). However, the intervention to cushion businesses: (a) didn't take a gendered approach, (b) paid more attention to businesses in the food sector compared to the energy, (c) neglected informal sector players who form 95% of the work force and the hardest hit, (d) was simply not sufficient to adequately alleviate the difficulties brought about by COVID-19.

Energy sector plans for greening all pre-date Covid-19. The most recent one (2015) focused on providing solar lights through a rural electrification project. However, this focused on providing light for domestic use and lighting public places, and not to support value chain activities such as food processing. The cost of solar installation for entrepreneurs is prohibitive, and most cannot afford it.

Some small businesses have taken advantage of digital technologies during this Covid-19 to maintain staff and stay relevant in the sector. Links between the food and energy sectors are weak.



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Just Transition and the Informal Sector (JUSTIS) - SDG 5, 14, 15, 17

The low carbon energy transition presents an immense risk of stranding Africa's hydrocarbon sector. The COVID 19 pandemic has already dealt severe blows to the economies of oil-exporting African countries. Beyond the impact of the transition on hydrocarbon companies and fossil-dependent communities, the transition could potentially exacerbate current injustices related to energy poverty, demand, supply, access, and distribution. The potential of the transition to exacerbate current injustices has raised a lot of concern, leading to several debates and social movements on "Just Transition" to ensure that the transition to a low carbon future delivers benefits rather than exacerbates the conditions of poor and vulnerable, fossil dependent communities. This study will interrogate the state and potential for 'just' low carbon transitions from an African perspective that considers the historical context of dependence on hydrocarbons beyond the formal sector. It will mainly focus on the informal sector as a critical dimension for sustainably managing stranding and low carbon transition and possibly exploring opportunities for the informal sector to lead the transition towards decarbonized economies. Many countries in Africa understand the need for a green transition but are not ready to completely decouple their economies from fossil fuels. The evidence base is either lacking or scattered or fragmented in many cases. In addition, the global south will meet much of the renewable energy needs of the transition. However, the infrastructure and the policies requirement to enable the transition are not in place. Therefore, this project could demonstrate and emphasise the need for a more tangible, practical and regional approach by targeting the informal sector. A green informal sector would contribute significantly to poverty alleviation, job creation, and the achievement of the broader sustainable development goals. Targeting the informal sector would open up several opportunities for policymakers to better respond to the challenges of the transition.

Furthermore, African policymakers have not been adequately engaged in the green transition debates and discussions. African policymakers often come very late to the discussions compared to policymakers from other regions. Therefore, it is essential to build the capacity of African policymakers and prepare them to effectively manage the transition and the growing impacts of climate change. This effort is necessary to drive the green transition and enable the structural transformation of African economies to stimulate a more rapid and inclusive economic growth more sustainably. This study, therefore, aims to highlight the contributions of green entrepreneurs to green transition efforts and provide supporting infrastructure for green businesses to thrive through the creation of a digital information portal.

FAST project (Earth-Shattering: Opportunities for Financial Sector Engagement at the Nexus of Modern Slavery and Natural Resources in Africa) - SDG 5

The United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR) and the Institute for Natural Resources in Africa (UNU-INRA) have initiated a study within the framework of the Finance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAST) project. This research identified ways in which the financial sector, governments and multilateral actors could synchronize action to tackle modern slavery in cocoa production and goldmining in Ghana.