

HLPF 2020 Highlights: Wednesday, 8 July 2020

On Wednesday, the HLPF continued to discuss the theme of “Building back better after COVID-19 and acting where we will have the greatest impact on the SDGs.” In the morning, sessions based on this theme were held on “Responding to the economic shocks, relaunching growth, sharing economic benefits and addressing developing countries’ financing challenges” and “Mobilizing international solidarity, accelerating action and embarking on new pathways to realize the 2030 Agenda and the SAMOA Pathway: Small Island Developing States (SIDS).” In the afternoon, participants discussed “Protecting the planet and building resilience” and “Sustaining efforts to ensure access to sustainable energy.”

Responding to the economic shocks, relaunching growth, sharing economic benefits and addressing developing countries’ financing challenges

Session chair Mher Margaryan, Permanent Representative of Armenia and Vice-President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), called for leadership from the public and private sectors, civil society, and the scientific community to reconfigure economic policy-making in line with the 2030 Agenda.

Mahmoud Mohieldin, Special Envoy on Financing the 2030 Agenda, moderated the session.

Resource person Carolina Sánchez-Páramo, World Bank, called for income support, ensuring functioning of food systems and markets, and locally-adapted policy responses.

Resource person Arunabha Ghosh, Council on Energy, Environment and Water, proposed a “global risk pooling reserve fund” to cushion countries against chronic risks, including climate change.

Lead discussant Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), highlighted the need for: global financial safety nets, including debt for SDGs swaps; investments in job stimulation; strengthening fiscal resources; and leveraging private finance.

Lead discussant Mamadou Diallo, Major Group for Workers and Trade Unions, called for labor protection floors, universal social protection, and social contracts based on protection for all workers.

Ministerial respondent Saad Alfarargi, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development, urged meaningful participation of

all stakeholders in holistic development agendas, budgets, and processes.

GUATEMALA, JAMAICA, and FIJI described national efforts to address the impacts of COVID-19, including social protection and cash transfers. FINLAND described the work of the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action to mainstream climate change into economic policies and support strategies for a green recovery. ETHIOPIA emphasized the role of means of implementation and global partnerships. The EU described short-term measures to control the impacts of the pandemic, and post-shock recovery efforts. INDONESIA invited contributions to its SDG financing hub. NEPAL said global solidarity is the only antidote to the devastating impacts of COVID-19.

URUGUAY highlighted the challenges faced by middle-income countries as a result of the pandemic. The INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION described the on-going Global Summit on COVID-19 and the World of Work. FRANCE underscored the important role of the world’s 450 development banks in promoting agile and efficient financial instruments to deal with the pandemic and the climate crisis, and to implement the 2030 Agenda. MADAGASCAR highlighted the interlinkages made between its national recovery plan and the SDGs.

In concluding remarks, Ghosh called for working capital to “employ the millions,” drive new growth, and create a cushion for vulnerable communities. Diallo proposed a new economic model to respond to people’s essential needs and to promote social justice. Alfarargi urged learning from the pandemic to deal better with future global crises.

Mobilizing international solidarity, accelerating action and embarking on new pathways to realize the 2030 Agenda and the SAMOA Pathway: SIDS

Chair Munir Akram, Permanent Representative of Pakistan and ECOSOC Vice-President, said SIDS need immediate and long-term debt relief and restructuring, extended credit facilities to provide adequate fiscal space for economic recovery, and revised income-based criteria for financial support.

Describing the devastating impact of COVID-19 on Fiji’s economy, keynote speaker Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, Fiji, called for: preferential access in global trade for SIDS; COVID-19 vaccines to be treated as a global public good; and reforms to the “out of date” international financial system.

Resource person Abdulla Shahid, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Maldives, called on international financial institutions to re-examine eligibility criteria for SIDS' access to loans and grants.

The ensuing discussion was moderated by Fekitamoeola 'Utoikamanu, High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and SIDS.

Highlighting the limited fiscal space of SIDS, resource person Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), called for a debt relief initiative irrespective of income levels, access to concessional funding, and the use of contingency bonds.

Resource person Terri Toyota, World Economic Forum, highlighted the need to leverage business and financial networks to mobilize investments and design creative financial vehicles.

Calling for solidarity to be placed at the forefront, lead discussant Karol Alejandra Arámbula Carrillo, NGO Major Group, emphasized the need for COVID-19 testing and vaccine development.

Ministerial respondent Marsha Caddle, Minister for Economic Affairs and Investment, Barbados, said provisions for natural disasters need to be incorporated into debt instruments and urged a focus on vulnerability rather than GDP per capita.

In the discussions, Belize, for the ALLIANCE OF SMALL ISLAND STATES, supported by DENMARK, said small islands face an "untenable" debt situation and called for access to concessional finance. Tuvalu, for the PACIFIC ISLAND FORUM, noted challenges, including the impact of the pandemic on the tourism sector and high levels of gender-based domestic violence. INDONESIA drew attention to its support to Fiji during Cyclone Harold. A youth representative from the NETHERLANDS highlighted a campaign to request an advisory opinion on the human rights aspects of climate change from the International Court of Justice. The UK said it would use its Presidency of the 2021 Climate Change Conference to encourage emission reductions in line with the Paris Agreement and increased ambition on adaptation, finance, and loss and damage. The FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UN (FAO) outlined three objectives for the SAMOA Pathway: enabling environments for food security; supporting sustainable nutrition and food systems; and empowering people for improved food security. ITALY called for: functioning international supply chains; support to the tourism sector; and green recovery incentives.

IRELAND called on international financial institutions to introduce measures that recognize the special conditions of SIDS, and remodel current financial instruments that are outdated. JAMAICA stressed the need for access to emergency liquidity support and rapid and sustained relief to SIDS. CUBA said SIDS continue to require sufficient and predictable climate finance flows.

AFGHANISTAN called for solidarity at all levels in support of countries in special situations. MOROCCO stressed the importance of cooperation and partnerships. CABO VERDE called for a SIDS compact to support national-level competitiveness, climate resilience, and access to digital cooperation and capacity building.

DENMARK said COVID-19 has laid bare the structural deficiencies of the global economic system. The WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP called for treating the Internet as a public good, embedding gender-responsive climate action in all COVID-19 recovery packages, and adopting action plans to respond to the

increase in gender-based violence. FIJI noted that SIDS dependent on tourism will take longer than other countries to recover. The ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS' ENGAGEMENT MECHANISM called for a retrospective taxation regime for corporations responsible for greenhouse gas emissions, to finance adaptation efforts in developing countries.

In conclusion, Shahid noted it is unrealistic for SIDS to restart debt repayments in 2021. Bárcena called for an international solidarity pandemic relief fund for SIDS; and for the International Monetary Fund to consider supporting the issuance of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) and reallocating idle SDRs.

Protecting the planet and building resilience

This session was chaired by ECOSOC Vice-President Akram, who called for re-thinking the entire structure of international trade and finance, saying measures such as debt suspension and World Bank funding facilities will yield only a fraction of the USD 2.5 trillion needed to enable developing countries to recover from the pandemic.

Moderator Shaun Tarbuck, International Cooperative and Mutual Insurance Federation, urged a shift from disaster response to prevention, and coherence in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Paris Agreement.

Resource person Adjany Costa, Minister for Culture, Tourism, and Environment, Angola, noted that local traditions, needs, and aspirations should be central to efforts to protect the planet.

Resource person Sandra Diaz, Co-Chair, Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), said the IPBES assessment found that scenarios compatible with the 2030 Agenda require transformational change. She highlighted three IPBES recommendations for pandemic recovery efforts: do no further harm to the health of people and nature; employ subsidies, incentives, investments, and regulations as carrots and sticks; and mainstream the health of people and nature into all sectors.

Lead discussant Takeuchi Kazuhiko, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, said Japan is focused on decentralized and integrated management of resources at appropriate geographical scales with a vision to decarbonize the economy and co-exist harmoniously with nature.

Highlighting the role farmers play in ensuring sustainable food systems, lead discussant Theo De Jager, Farmers Major Group, called on banking and financial institutions to be key partners in developing services that support rural communities.

Ministerial respondent Joaquín Roa Burgos, Minister of the National Emergency Secretariat, Paraguay, called for the current "global paralysis" to be transformed into accelerated efforts towards environmental protection and climate change mitigation.

Ministerial respondent María Claudia García, Vice-Minister of Environment Normalization, Colombia, outlined her country's "biodiversidad" concept, which incorporates nature into urban planning.

Ministerial respondent Eva Svedling, State Secretary at the Ministry of Environment, Sweden, urged a continued prioritization of climate change during the pandemic recovery period and called on countries to enhance their nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement.

Underscoring the role of mangroves in protecting coastal communities, ministerial respondent Enamur Rahman, State Minister, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Bangladesh, highlighted his government's efforts in successfully evacuating 2.4 million people during a cyclone while observing social distancing measures.

Ministerial respondent Kitty Sweeb, Permanent Representative of Suriname, called for the inclusion of forest-based solutions into the immediate and long-term pandemic response and recovery plans.

Respondent Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity, said this is a "pivotal moment" in world history, and noted that the post-2020 global biodiversity framework is at a zero draft stage, building on the best science and an ongoing consultation process.

In the discussion, FINNISH AGENDA 2030 YOUTH GROUP urged addressing the root cause of the pandemic – the destruction of natural habitats and wildlife trade. TUVALU called for working together as "one Blue Continent," drawing attention to the Pacific Aid for Trade Strategy.

In conclusion, Moderator Tarbuck said the private sector needs to assume greater responsibility for the planet.

Sustaining efforts to ensure access to sustainable energy

This session was chaired by ECOSOC Vice-President Margaryan. He cautioned against postponing the energy transition.

Moderator Damilola Ogunbiyi, UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Sustainable Energy for All, described energy as "the golden thread that connects economic growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability" and announced a high-level dialogue on sustainable energy, convened by the UN Secretary-General, in September 2021.

Resource person Francesco La Camera, Director-General, International Renewable Energy Agency, called for doubling annual energy transition investment to USD 2 trillion over the next three years, to provide an effective stimulus.

Resource person Hans Olav Ibrekk, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway, said current ambition on renewable energy and energy efficiency is inadequate to keep average global temperature rise below 1.5°C, and called for stronger political commitment to maintain the momentum on SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy).

Resource person Sheila Oparaocha, ENERGIA, called for integrating sustainable energy solutions into COVID-19 recovery strategies, prioritizing modern energy, creating jobs in sustainable energy, and phasing out inefficient energy subsidies.

Lead discussant Leena Srivastava, Scientific and Technological Community Major Group, underscored a focus on quality, reliability, efficiency, and pricing of energy when measuring energy access.

Ministerial respondent Omar Ayub Khan, Minister of Energy, Pakistan, proposed an international mechanism to create bankable projects for project financing to reduce urban-rural disparities in energy access.

Ministerial respondent Cristina Gallach, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Spain, emphasized the opportunity to address climate change offered by the pandemic and noted her government's support for the European Green Deal.

Respondent Li Yong, Director General, UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) shared best practices for SDG 7, including the formulation of integrated resource and resilience plans, and clean technology innovation programmes to support entrepreneurs.

Respondent Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, called for "risk informing" energy investments.

Ministerial respondent Fatima Al Foora, Assistant Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, United Arab Emirates, noted her government's support to energy access in other countries and invited others to join that effort.

FRANCE, PORTUGAL, DENMARK, and SWEDEN emphasized the role of the private sector in helping to align financial flows with the goals of the Paris Agreement. CHILDREN AND YOUTH underscored that fossil fuel subsidies continue to outweigh subsidies for renewables. INDONESIA highlighted efforts to enhance energy access by setting up village funds to deploy renewable energy.

NORWAY stressed that opening the electricity market to private sector competition is a "win-win" advantage for energy security and consumers. NEPAL called for integrating SDG 7 and its targets into post-COVID-19 responses. The NGO MAJOR GROUP called for funding to support capacity development and assistance to local communities, to enable the transition to a renewable future. IRAQ called for increased participation of the private sector. GUATEMALA urged continuing efforts to mobilize financial resources, and to identify new opportunities for collaboration. POLAND called attention to the role of nuclear power in boosting the COVID-19 recovery. COSTA RICA highlighted the "golden opportunity" to transition to clean energy. The WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP urged involving women and girls in COVID-19 recovery planning, eliminating fossil fuel subsidies, and providing healthcare facilities with sustainable energy access.

In the Cyber-Corridors

COVID-19 has laid bare several shortcomings in global systems, and the clamoring for reform continued during the second day of the HLPF. Among the shortcomings is the criteria for accessing concessional finance and official development assistance (ODA). SIDS are experiencing "the everyday challenges of smallness and isolation" as tourism has ground to a standstill, and they find themselves "walking a tightrope" between vanishing revenue streams and a major pile-up of debt that needs servicing. Most SIDS are locked out from access to concessional finance because they fall into the middle-income category. The situation is "untenable," and a number of speakers – not only from small islands – agreed that income indicators are too narrow as criteria for access to ODA and concessional finance. Vulnerability, with all its dimensions, should be the focus, said one delegate. It is clear that simply rescheduling debt will not work in the current circumstances, as the tourism industry will be slow to recover, said another. The international community has already recognized the need for speed to stem losses in development gains due to the pandemic, mused a virtual viewer, so how quickly will it respond to this call?

