

HLPF 2020 Highlights: Thursday, 9 July 2020

Discussions on the umbrella theme on “Building back better after COVID-19 and acting where we will have the greatest impact on the SDGs” continued at the HLPF on Thursday. In the morning, two sessions took place, on “Bolstering local action to control the pandemic and accelerate implementation,” and “Are we leaving no one behind in eradicating poverty and working towards the 2030 Agenda?” In the afternoon, participants discussed “Mobilizing international solidarity, accelerating action, and embarking on new pathways to realize the 2030 Agenda and respond to COVID-19: African countries, Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs).”

Bolstering local action to control the pandemic and accelerate implementation

This session was chaired by Juan Sandoval, Permanent Representative of Mexico and Vice-President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). In his opening remarks, he called attention to the critical role of cities, local authorities, and communities in realizing the SDGs.

Gino Van Begin, Local Governments for Sustainability, moderated the discussion.

Resource person Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director, UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), said building greater resilience to future pandemics will also improve the resilience of communities in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Resource person Yūji Kuroiwa, Governor, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan, called attention to the potential of the digital transformation in controlling COVID-19 outbreaks in cities, for instance, by using smartphone apps to track the physical and mental health of citizens.

Lead discussant Olga Algayerová, Executive Secretary, UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), stressed that restrictions on freedoms of assembly and movement imposed to reduce the spread of COVID-19 should not compromise public consultation and participation in development projects.

Lead discussant Santiago del Hierro, architect, Ecuador, highlighted the need to invest in inexpensive, bottom-up, scalable, low-tech innovations to address basic human needs.

Lead discussant Mabel Bianco, Women’s Major Group, highlighted the potential role of science, technology, and innovation (STI)

in making cities and urban areas more inclusive, while calling for a systemic approach to SDG implementation.

Respondent Penny Abeywardena, Commissioner for International Affairs, New York City, highlighted her city’s role in pioneering Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) in 2018 and promoting the approach elsewhere, including through a VLR Declaration signed by 208 local and regional governments so far.

In the discussion, FINLAND noted efforts to integrate the SDGs into local strategies and budgets, saying Finnish cities are small and ideal environments for piloting innovations, but the scaling up process must take into account different local circumstances. INDONESIA highlighted efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 in densely populated areas. FRANCE underscored the benefits of solidarity and reciprocity between local governments. The UK highlighted the role of data disaggregation by geographical location to support local SDG implementation. BELGIUM noted that if the SDGs had been realized, the chances of the pandemic starting, or having significant impact, would have been lower.

Noting that criminal groups are using the pandemic to expand influence and increase activity, the UN OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME highlighted the need to tackle organized crime as a part of efforts to build back better. SWEDEN called on national governments to support sustainable infrastructure investment at the local levels. NORWAY underscored the necessity of decent working conditions for public service employees. LOCAL AUTHORITIES emphasized the role of basic service provision at the local level, including housing, food, and water, in tackling the pandemic. GUATEMALA highlighted the formulation of 250 municipal plans to address the pandemic, with the participation of civil society. The EU emphasized the importance of monitoring progress on the SDGs at the local level and the role of data platforms. INDIGENOUS PEOPLES expressed concern about land grabbing by illegal loggers while villagers self-isolate due to the pandemic. The UN OFFICE FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION said risk reduction and management plans have to be complemented by financing strategies.

The NGO MAJOR GROUP welcomed text in the draft HLPF ministerial declaration encouraging countries to share locally-driven development approaches and empower local authorities to ensure SDG ownership. AFGHANISTAN quoted the UN Secretary-General who said, “none of us is safe until all of us are safe,” and said security, stability, and resources are key to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The WOMEN’S MAJOR GROUP called for

the establishment and resourcing of local administrative units to facilitate consultations with women, girls, and gender non-binary persons. The ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS' ENGAGEMENT MECHANISM (APRCM) called for the participation of marginalized groups, including women and girls, in development planning.

Summarizing key elements to address the pandemic, Sharif stressed finance and “rethinking the state.” Kuroiwa said the interlinkages between SDGs are easier to address at the local level. Algayerova noted the UN regional commissions are supporting resilient, green recoveries that facilitate job creation, development, local skills, and sustainability. Del Hierro identified the need for countries to “co-create” technologies relevant to their specific needs.

In conclusion, Sandoval said local involvement and commitment is crucial to build back better.

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

This session was chaired by Mher Margaryan, Permanent Representative of Armenia and ECOSOC Vice-President.

Moderator Diane Elson, University of Essex, highlighted the lack of investment in social safety nets and called for bold national and international policies to transform economies.

Resource person Ifeyinwa Ofong, WorldWIDE Network Nigeria, lamented the commodification of housing and land, with negative impacts on the right to housing and access to land.

Resource person Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director, UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), highlighted extreme global wealth inequality while calling for a “people’s vaccine” against COVID-19, with priority access for health workers and vulnerable groups.

Lead discussant Rola Dashti, Executive Secretary, UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), called for redistribution policies and universal social protection systems.

Lead discussant Anriette Esterhuysen, Internet Governance Forum, urged tackling the digital divide, which she said is resulting in inequalities in access to education.

Lead discussant Sophia Bachmann, German UN Youth Delegate on Sustainable Development, called for a policy shift from job creation to decent job creation.

Lead discussant John Patrick Ngoyi, Together 2030, urged enhancing the capacity of vulnerable groups to engage in direct dialogue with governments.

Respondent Natalia Kanem, Executive Director, UN Population Fund (UNFPA), said quality population data is necessary for service provision and empowering people to enjoy their rights.

Respondent Paul Ladd, UN Research Institute for Social Development, called for a post-pandemic review of fiscal policy, and said only a few countries have prioritized the needs of vulnerable groups in recovery packages.

In the discussion, NICARAGUA proposed nuclear disarmament and a reduction in military budgets to finance the move to net-zero emissions by 2050. MEXICO called for multi-sectoral policy-making. A youth delegate from the NETHERLANDS called on governments to engage directly with youth to address job losses.

The REPUBLIC OF KOREA said his country’s stimulus packages have included emergency relief payments for all citizens, financial support to households and small and medium-size enterprises, and employment retention programmes. The STAKEHOLDER GROUP OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES said inclusion has been disrupted by the pandemic, inequality is deepening, and discrimination is rising. The EU underscored the need to address inequalities by empowering people, ensuring opportunities, and taking a rights-based approach for sustainable recoveries. JAMAICA called for early warning systems for social and economic issues, such as data to identify emerging vulnerable groups.

NEPAL cautioned that the pandemic risks reversing past development achievements. INDIA described national social protection initiatives and achievements. CHINA said the Belt and Road Initiative lifts 7.6 million people out of extreme poverty and 32 million from moderate poverty in various countries. The VOLUNTEER STAKEHOLDER GROUP highlighted the role of volunteers in extending the reach of SDG-related services to marginalized people and in supporting VNRs.

SWITZERLAND called for the inclusion of internally displaced people in sustainable development efforts. SOUTH AFRICA stressed global cooperation and collaboration in the discovery and distribution of vaccines. A youth delegate from SWEDEN called for meaningful participation of young people in decision-making. INDONESIA emphasized access to health services and social protection. NORWAY proposed a global fund for social protection and supported international tax governance reform. GUATEMALA stressed the importance of disaggregated data and regional solidarity.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES called for an end to violations of their rights, and for their full participation in decision-making for COVID-19 recovery and sustainable development. FRANCE highlighted the issuance of Special Drawing Rights by the International Monetary Fund and the crucial role of civil society in emergency response and delivery of public services. AFGHANISTAN said existing mechanisms can be better utilized for recovery efforts. FINLAND and NIGERIA urged using intersectional approaches and identifying synergies to build back better. The INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION called for bridging the digital divide to ensure that everyone has access to health care services. The NGO MAJOR GROUP cautioned against “supplanting” local service providers and called on governments to work with civil society. The WOMEN’S MAJOR GROUP called for addressing the systematic drivers of exclusion by placing women’s rights at the center of policy-making. A civil society representative from BOTSWANA urged addressing the inequalities exposed by the pandemic.

In closing, Moderator Elson highlighted solidarity, universality, and cooperation.

Mobilizing international solidarity, accelerating action and embarking on new pathways to realize the 2030 Agenda and respond to COVID-19: African countries, LDCs, and LLDCs

This session was chaired by Mona Juul, Permanent Representative of Norway and ECOSOC President. Fahmida Khatun, Centre for Policy Dialogue, moderated.

Keynote speaker Agnes Kalibata, Special Envoy for the 2021 Food System Summit, called for investment in food systems,

integration of climate change into recovery plans, and debt relief for countries with unsustainable debt.

Resource person Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, former Prime Minister of Niger, called for well-being, job creation, resilience, inclusiveness, and equity as measures of success, instead of GDP.

Resource person Khalifa bin Jassim Al-Kuwari, Qatar Fund for Development, highlighted a global network of 60 Accelerator Labs to test local solutions for global challenges; and called for “standby” action plans and financing mechanisms to reduce the humanitarian impacts and costs of global crises, and safeguard development gains.

Resource person Ahmed Ouma, African Center for Disease Control and Prevention, reported on solidarity measures within the African continent to share political and strategic guidance, secure borders, and mobilize resources to support preparedness and response.

Lead discussant Vanessa Chivizhe, Junior Parliament of Zimbabwe, called for inclusion of youth in every step of decision-making, and for implementation of existing policies.

Lead discussant Trymore Karikoga, Volunteers Stakeholder Group, urged states to integrate volunteering in all stages of the 2030 Agenda process.

Respondent ‘Matsepo Molise-Ramakoae, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Relations, Lesotho, called for assistance to LLDCs in the light of the devastating socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19, including increased official development assistance from development partners.

Respondent Fekitamoeloa ‘Utoikamanu, High Representative for the LDCs, LLDCs, and Small Island Developing States, noted the need to improve transport connectivity, trade facilitation, and access to ICT and digital connectivity.

Respondent Thomas Munthali, National Planning Commission, Malawi, stressed the need to build the capacity of LLDCs to diversify and realize their export potential.

In the discussion, BOLIVIA called for a “solid” partnership to help LLDCs overcome the challenges they face in benefiting from international trade. A civil society representative from BELGIUM urged a focus on social protection and rule of law. Burkina Faso, for the AFRICAN GROUP, called for innovative financing instruments to remedy the situation faced by indebted countries. MOROCCO called for international solidarity to be translated into deliverable actions. Malawi, on behalf of the LDCs, called for an emergency health package to support the immediate pandemic-related needs of LDCs. The PHILIPPINES called on countries to use their collective bargaining power to ensure the future COVID-19 vaccine is accessible and affordable. The NGO MAJOR GROUP called for an integrated approach to ensure universal access to energy and digital technology. PORTUGAL proposed a new development model that preserves development gains and promotes resilience and sustainability. NEPAL said the pandemic is jeopardizing the graduation of countries from LDC status, and called for an international framework to aid the transition.

The UK said his country is working towards an ambitious action plan to deliver international support to LDCs. The WOMEN’S MAJOR GROUP urged global leaders to relieve the debt burden of LDCs. SIERRA LEONE called for support in the form of finance, international trade, technology, capacity building, and emergency debt relief and cancellation. INDONESIA identified the need for personal protective equipment and capacity building for medical and frontline workers in African countries, LDCs, and LLDCs. AFGHANISTAN and PARAGUAY drew attention to the priorities listed in the Istanbul Programme of Action for LDCs and the Vienna Programme for LLDCs respectively, as the basis for addressing the COVID-19 crisis. The BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY MAJOR GROUP commended references made during the session to improving business environments and private sector partnerships around the Food System Summit. IRELAND commended the coordination among African multilateral institutions, the private sector, and regional disease control centers in supporting COVID-19 response strategies.

BANGLADESH called on states to safeguard rights of migrant workers. ETHIOPIA called for rapid solutions to protect employment. SOUTH AFRICA highlighted the African Union’s COVID-19 Response Fund and invited contributions. APRCEM called for the suspension of patent laws to allow LDCs to access medical supplies. CHINA highlighted its efforts to support developing countries, including through the suspension of debt repayment and through interest-free loans. NIGERIA noted its COVID-19 basket fund, established with private sector support to reach those furthest behind. MONGOLIA highlighted space for more coordinated effort to address concerns of LLDCs.

In the Cyber-Corridors

As HLPF returned to its recurring theme of “leaving no one behind” in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, one participant pointed out that this framing “sanitizes” the real problem. The issue, she said, is not only that millions are being left behind, but rather that they are being pushed behind, while a few push their way ahead. This exclusion is further exacerbated by the pandemic, added other speakers, because of the differential access to healthcare and social safety nets, pre-existing vulnerabilities, and the digital divide which now impedes not only access to information, but also to education.

Over and above the concern for vulnerable sections of society, delegates expressed fears of another form of *en masse* exclusion in the future, through “vaccine nationalism.” Some countries already exhibit signs of “each to their own” when it comes to medical supplies for the prevention or cure of COVID-19, said one delegate. She called for support for the initiative by the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNAIDS to develop a “people’s vaccine” through global cooperation, as a global public good that will be available free to everyone, everywhere. The logic of this argument is difficult to refute, observed a virtual viewer – in this particular case at least, the few cannot push forward without the many. In the words of the UN Secretary-General, “none of us is safe until all of us are safe.”