

HLPF 2020 Highlights:

Friday, 10 July 2020

On Friday morning, two sessions were held under the umbrella theme of “Means of implementation to match the scope of the crisis and the breadth of our ambition for 2030,” on “Mobilizing well directed financing” and “Science, technology, and innovation (STI).” Five countries presented their voluntary national reviews (VNRs) in the afternoon: Armenia, Samoa, Ecuador, Honduras, and Slovenia.

Mobilizing Well Directed Financing

This session was chaired by Mona Juul, Permanent Representative of Norway and President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Moderator Annalisa Prizzon, Overseas Development Institute, encouraged countries to commit a sizable share of their fiscal stimulus packages to development cooperation, and invest in multilateral development banks, which she said can mobilize resources quickly and at scale.

Resource person Ryan Straughn, Minister of Finance, Barbados, called for determining access to financing based on measures of vulnerability, noting that vulnerability is not linked to a country’s economic prospects or income level.

Resource person Jorge Moreira da Silva, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), underscored the importance of maintaining existing official development assistance (ODA) commitments in the context of falling external flows and tax revenues in low and middle-income countries.

Highlighting that only 3% of the world’s venture capital goes to women, resource person Sharinee Shannon Kalayanamitr, Gobi Partners, called for partnerships and ecosystems to connect stakeholders in support of companies founded by women.

Lead discussant Ambroise Fayolle, European Investment Bank, said the Bank has designed a EUR 5 billion package to support COVID-19 response and recovery in the poorest countries.

Lead discussant Lidy Nacpil, Asian Peoples’ Movement on Debt and Development, urged the UN to lead calls for wider and deeper debt cancellation, relief, and restructuring; additional finance without debt or conditionalities; and reviews of illegitimate debt practices, and of lending and borrowing policies.

Respondent Marie-Gabrielle Ineichen-Fleisch, State Secretary for Economic Affairs, Switzerland, supported structural reform to free up public and private resources to address global challenges like climate change, and global efforts to reduce the cost of remittances.

In the discussion, NICARAGUA called for the international community to provide urgent and easy to access emergency finance. FRANCE called on private creditors to work to align public and private finance with the SDGs and the Paris Agreement, and to transform supply chains. The EU underscored its investments in green technologies and digital education in a just and fair way. INDONESIA described national measures to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic, including social security and subsidies for the poor. PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES called for accountability and funding to implement the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy,

and to ensure income security and disability-related support for labor market participation of persons with disabilities. SWEDEN described efforts to mobilize non-earmarked multilateral core support to address the impacts of the pandemic, and urged scaling up green bonds, guarantees, and blended finance.

UN WOMEN called for deliberate policy measures to address structural gender inequalities, including assessments of the gender impacts of post-pandemic stimulus packages. NEPAL said the pandemic has undermined his country’s recent high economic growth. A civil society representative from NORWAY called for international solidarity on debt relief and highlighted the work of the High-level Panel on International Financial Accountability, Transparency, and Integrity. NIGERIA noted efforts to improve access to working capital for small and medium-sized enterprises.

In closing remarks, Kalayanamitr said joint task groups are needed to map out and connect the SDGs with implementers on the ground. Moreira da Silva said the OECD is committed to continuing its focus on data to improve the evidence base of policies. Straughn said international frameworks need to be open, transparent, and equitable.

Science, Technology, and Innovation

This session was chaired by Juan Sandoval, Permanent Representative of Mexico and ECOSOC Vice-President.

Moderator George Essegbey, Science and Technology Policy Research Institute, highlighted the need to strengthen connections between science and policy.

Resource person Vaughan Turekian, Co-Chair of the 10 Member Group to Support the Technology Facilitation Mechanism, said the pandemic has revealed how technology is changing the relationship between science and society, and stressed the need for all researchers to have access to necessary technologies.

Resource person Helen Rees, Wits Reproductive Health and HIV Institute, welcomed the speed of STI-related global cooperation in response to the pandemic, but worried that African scientists and voices have been left out.

Lead discussant Teresa Stoepler, InterAcademy Partnership for Research, highlighted the lack of international cooperation and of scientific capacity in some countries to respond to the pandemic, and the threats to scientific cooperation from the rise in nationalism.

Lead discussant Elenita Dano, Erosion, Technology and Concentration Group, decried “a digital dreamworld that enriches few” while a large proportion of humanity does not have access to the Internet or even to electricity.

Respondent Viktor Nedović, Assistant Minister of Education, Science and Technological Development, Serbia, emphasized the importance of mobilizing the potential of STI in times of crisis.

Respondent Kekgonne Baipoledi, Ministry of Tertiary Education, Research, Science, and Technology, Botswana, called for a redirection of STI policies to ensure that emerging technologies enable marginalized people to transform their lives for the better.

Respondent Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education, and Youth, said the

pandemic highlights the need for new forms of collaboration and purpose-driven innovation.

In the discussion, INDIA, also speaking on behalf of JAPAN, reaffirmed that “STI for SDG” roadmaps are valuable tools for both national implementation and international cooperation. Finland, for the GROUP OF FRIENDS ON DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES, identified the need to: address the digital gap for vulnerable groups; counter disinformation; and protect rights, including privacy, online. ISRAEL called for: facilitating sharing of scientific results; cooperation between scientific disciplines; making technology solutions accessible for all; fostering trust in science; and improving ways to communicate data to decision-makers.

NICARAGUA said the predicted automation of 40% of jobs by 2035 will exacerbate extreme inequality and called for country-driven models to support job creation. FINLAND called for support for open science and innovation. INDONESIA outlined her country’s technology responses to COVID-19. GUATEMALA said STI supports equal access to development opportunities, democracy, and reduction of social inequalities. BANGLADESH called for more investment in research and development to bridge the STI divide. The INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION described its platform to ensure telecommunication networks remain resilient during the COVID-19 crisis. EGYPT called for scaling up innovations in agriculture to produce more food in a sustainable way. POLAND suggested automation and robotization could help sustain production processes during the pandemic.

JAMAICA called for greater investment in broadband connectivity and technology solutions for low-income, rural families. NORWAY emphasized the necessity of global digital open innovation programmes to help foster universal access to science and research. The WOMEN’S MAJOR GROUP said uneven access to information and communication technologies is adversely impacting the gender gap and called for investments to reverse this trend. NIGERIA said the benefits of STI have remained limited to developed countries. BOTSWANA said STI can contribute to people, the planet, peace, and prosperity but this requires partnerships. COSTA RICA highlighted its social security fund through which people can assess their COVID-19 related risks and track symptoms. BELGIUM said integrated technology solutions should be implementable, scalable, and sustainable.

Voluntary National Reviews

This session was chaired by Mher Margaryan, Permanent Representative of Armenia and ECOSOC Vice-President, who highlighted regular reviews of progress as an essential part of the follow up and review architecture of the 2030 Agenda.

In opening remarks, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed identified key emerging themes in this year’s VNRs, including: an emphasis on budget and financing frameworks; a continued commitment to leave no one behind; and the growing engagement of local governments in implementation. She said the UN Secretary-General’s updated VNR guidelines, due later in 2020, would reflect the need for a “forward-looking” spirit in the VNRs.

ECOSOC Vice-President Sandoval, in his capacity as Chair of the Group of Friends of the VNRs and Follow-up and Review of the 2030 Agenda, noted that peer learning is at the heart of the VNRs.

Presenting **Armenia’s** second VNR, Mher Grigoryan, Deputy Prime Minister, highlighted: preparations to formulate Armenia Transformation 2050, a strategy with 16 goals and targets; progress in reforming the judicial system; and the high-tech industry as a driver for growth. He noted challenges to ending poverty by 2023 and to reducing the unemployment rate; and mentioned the launch of 20 COVID-19 assistance packages amounting to 2% of GDP

Responding to RUSSIA, EGYPT, MEXICO, and KYRGYZSTAN, Grigoryan underscored: the adoption of advanced agricultural technologies; plans to increase the share of solar in electricity production to 15% by 2030; an increase in the share of female members of Parliament since the 2019 election; and protection of human rights as a key priority.

Presenting **Samoa’s** second VNR, Fiame Naomi Mata’afa, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment, highlighted progress in: literacy and numeracy; engaging stakeholders; integrating the SDGs and the SAMOA Pathway into national development planning; women’s representation in Parliament; and strengthening disaster risk response.

Responding to NEW ZEALAND, IRELAND, and the INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP, Mata’afa reported that: data availability and quality has improved, and a data validation process is in place; and although Samoa remains COVID-19-free, the tourism sector and remittances have been impacted. She took note of a statement by the INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP that 10% of persons with disabilities in Samoa have never been to school.

Presenting **Ecuador’s** second VNR, Sandra Katherine Argotty, Technical Secretariat of Planning, highlighted improvements in indicators on gender income equality, maternal mortality, sanitation services, work force integration of people with disabilities, housing poverty eradication, and Internet usage. Identifying COVID-19-related challenges, she listed: economic contraction; reduction in foreign exchange income; challenges in access to remote learning; and rising violence against women.

Responding to questions from PERU, INDIA and ESTONIA, Argotty highlighted: prioritization of the needs of the poorest; formulation of medium and long-term plans to adapt to falling oil prices; and the need for greater flexibility from international financing institutions on payment obligations.

Honduras’ second VNR highlighted: continued challenges to providing decent work despite significant economic growth; efforts to tackle extreme poverty through programmes such as the Better Life subsidy that provides conditional cash transfers to improve access to health, education, and housing; and a reallocation of public expenditure due to the pandemic.

Responding to questions from PERU and GUATEMALA, she said the National Commission for SDGs adopts an inclusive approach to planning, and municipalities have been provided with guides to link local planning with the 2030 Agenda.

Presenting **Slovenia’s** second VNR, Zvone Černač, Minister for Development, Strategic Projects and Cohesion, highlighted: efforts to ensure accessible and high quality public services for all; subsidized school meals and free public transport for school children and pensioners; access to drinking water for all; and a policy to provide one year of maternal leave.

The presentation of Slovenia’s VNR was interrupted due to technical difficulties with the audio, and the session was adjourned.

In the Cyber-Corridors

The world has been jolted into rapid digitalization by the COVID-19 pandemic, as exemplified by the virtual format of the HLPF this year. At the session on STI, some saw this as a welcome development that can contribute to better global crisis management, while others worried about further exclusion of the 3.3 billion that still lack access to the Internet. In the least developed countries, one speaker pointed out, only 20% of the population has Internet access. Another speaker worried about a “digital dreamworld that enriches a few.” Even access to the Internet would be meaningless without ways for meaningful participation, she pointed out. With civil society representatives reporting the use of the pandemic lockdown to circumvent public participation in development planning, she said what the world needs more of is “not artificial intelligence, but emotional intelligence.” Similar concerns had prompted 460 civil society organizations from 115 countries to send a joint letter to UN Member States ahead of this year’s HLPF session, calling for “inclusive virtual modalities” to support effective stakeholder involvement. In response, 61 governments signed a pledge to support stakeholder participation at the session. Given the day’s focus on STI, virtual viewers felt the irony of the last VNR presentation of the day being cut short due to audio failure, resulting in the captioning software complaining that the [audio is skipping]... [audio is indiscernible]... [audio is garbled]...