

HLPF 2021 Highlights: Wednesday, 7 July 2021

Six years after adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, key questions remain on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). How do we get on track to end poverty and hunger, and transform towards inclusive and sustainable economies? How do we revamp and transform consumption and production and address and mitigate climate change? And what should we do about the 21 SDG targets that matured in 2020 and have not been fully achieved? These were some of the topics the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development addressed Wednesday.

SDGs in focus: How do we get on track to end poverty and hunger, and transform towards inclusive and sustainable economies?

In her keynote address, Sania Nishtar, Federal Minister and Special Assistant on Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, discussed the disproportionate socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on the poor. She described Pakistan's COVID-19 response, including Ehsaas, Pakistan's poverty alleviation framework, that is strengthening social safety nets and promoting social inclusion.

Maria-Francesca Spatolisano, UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), presented the [outcomes](#) of an open poll on good practices in SDG implementation. She highlighted some of the 740 submissions: the EU External Investment Plan, Partnership for Action on Green Economy, Yucatan Solidario, the SINERGI Project, the Planet+ Program for Carbon Neutrality by 2022, and Impact Investing by Merck pharmaceutical.

Yongyi Min, UNDESA, presented elements of the Secretary-General's [report](#) on progress toward SDGs 1 (no poverty), 2, (zero hunger), and 8 (decent work and economic growth). She said the global poverty rate is projected to be 7% by 2030, missing the SDG target of 3%. Between 83-132 million people experienced hunger in 2020 and 255 million people lost full time jobs, four times the number lost during the 2007-2009 financial crisis. Youth and women were especially hard hit.

Panel Discussion 1: Moderator Gerda Verburg, Coordinator, Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, highlighted how partnerships play a crucial role in attaining the SDGs and spurring

economic growth. She asked panelists to present concrete actions on how to get on track to end poverty and hunger.

Guy Ryder, Director General, International Labour Organization (ILO), noted the pandemic alone is not responsible for the lag in meeting SDG targets and encouraged universal social protection, more coherence in health, social, and economic policies and for developed countries to “get serious” about financing developing countries climb out of poverty.

Aloysius Ordu, Africa Growth Initiative, Brookings Institution, expressed disappointment with the inadequate contributions to COVAX. He pointed out that only 2.4% of Africans have received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, predicting a widening gap in vaccination rates between the Global North and Global South.

Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, urged for a new model of growth—one that is more inclusive and reduces the tension between alleviating poverty and addressing the human ecological footprint. He also called for universal social protection and the formalization of informal workers.

Ruramiso Mashumba, Director and Founder of Mnandi Africa, Zimbabwe, emphasized the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on young farmers, women, and small and medium-sized enterprises. She called for better communication channels for local farmers who are precluded from high-level forums such as HLPF where informative solutions and options are offered.

Meryame Kitir, Minister for Development Cooperation, Belgium, reiterated that the pandemic is not just a health emergency, but an economic and social crisis. She described how Belgium has adopted an effective social protection system, but urged localized needs must be taken into account in creating a universal social protection system.

Silvana Eugenia Vargas Winstanley, Minister of Development and Social Inclusion, Peru, explained that her country reduced poverty between 2004 and 2011 using cash transfer programmes and promoting early childhood development.

In the subsequent discussion, INDONESIA committed to strengthen food security as a national priority, including through food waste management, increased agricultural productivity, and cultivation of underutilized land. THAILAND discussed action on poverty eradication by establishing a national multidimensional

poverty reduction index, which includes education, quality of life, and financial security to target poverty in a comprehensive manner.

NEPAL called for scaling up international cooperation, saying Nepal was on its way to reducing poverty and hunger, until the COVID-19 pandemic. FRANCE described their reliance on strong social safety nets, including subsidies for housing, unemployment networks, and commitments to protect those disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

The WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP stated that unemployment in 2020 was higher for women than men. She called for market-based and corporate-based solutions to address structural barriers for women and girls, and a holistic approach to respond to other forms of inequality.

FINLAND presented their school meals policy, stating its importance in supporting children's health and education. They invited other countries to join the coalition to support school nutrition, which will be launched at the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) in September 2021

The EU presented policy options, including the European Pillar of Social Rights, the NextGenerationEU instrument, designed to help rebuild a post-COVID-19 Europe; and the European Green Deal, focused on climate change and economic growth decoupled from resource use.

SWITZERLAND spoke about reforming global food systems, saying the upcoming UNFSS will only be effective if its outcomes are implemented.

SWEDEN stressed the importance of the private sector in tackling global poverty and existing inequalities, noting that many companies are implementing transformational sustainability strategies, since these are necessary to achieve the SDGs but are also good for business.

NORWAY described their strategy to build more resilient climate communities, stressing that the private sector has to play a major role, including forming better partnerships with the public sector.

Panel Discussion 2: Gilbert Hougbo, President, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) highlighted the need to hear the voices of small producers (herders, fishers, farmers), who generate 30-70% of food globally. He advocated for an inclusive and fair food system, improved data and metrics, gender-disaggregated nutrition data, and partnerships.

Katherine Richardson, University of Copenhagen, stressed: the need to address hunger and nutrition together; the importance of safety nets for the 750 million small-scale farmers; and the need for food systems transformation to meet climate goals and the nutritional demand of future populations.

Maximo Torero, UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), emphasized uniting public and private investment and financing for agriculture, and combining incentives and policies towards the SDGs. He noted USD 39 billion is required to achieve SDG 2.

Eric Manzi, African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation, stressed the importance of SDG 8

for building global resilience, equal pay, and universal access to COVID-19 vaccines.

Lassané Kabore, Minister of Economy, Finance and Development, Burkina Faso, pointed out that certain reductions in poverty have not been accompanied by reductions in inequality. He called for an inclusive agricultural transformation and technical and financial support partnerships.

Thanawat Tiensin, Chair, Committee on World Food Security (Thailand), described the recently adopted Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition, which support nature-based solutions to address hunger and malnutrition, including agro-ecological and other innovative approaches to strengthen sustainable agriculture and food systems.

In the discussion, CHINA said they achieved SDG 1 ten years ahead of schedule, China's food production contributes to global food security, and the number of new jobs in urban areas exceeds 10 million. The INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP said the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated poverty and hunger for Indigenous Peoples, compounding existing exploitation of their land and resources.

GUATEMALA described its efforts to combat malnutrition including its Great Crusade for Nutrition strategy and implementing a school meals law tailored toward 3 million children. The PHILIPPINES mentioned its task force on zero hunger by 2030 and recent legislation that addresses intensified social protection measures, promotion, and utilization of technology in agriculture, and ensuring employability of the workforce, including women, seafarers, and youth.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION noted that its agriculture sector grew in 2020, had record income from exports, and became a net exporter of food. He also supported the coalition to support school nutrition.

In the subsequent discussion, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) noted climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss are compounding challenges to ending poverty and hunger. He emphasized the need for multifaceted green policies that acknowledge the interlinkages between human and animal health along with food systems. The LGBTI STAKEHOLDER GROUP emphasized how people who identify with this group will be adversely impacted by the aftershocks of the pandemic and called for consultation with local LGBTI groups for design and implementation of policies and programmes.

THE HOLY SEE noted the increase in people pushed into deeper poverty as a result of the pandemic. He said Pope Francis's term, "pharmaceutical poverty," reflects the lack of vaccine access, and highlighted how multilateralism is the answer to closing the vaccine gap. BANGLADESH explained that national progress on reducing poverty is inhibited by the pandemic. He suggested that increased private sector engagement and integration of youth in global markets could mitigate the negative economic impacts of COVID-19.

THE ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT MECHANISM demanded more investment

in unemployed youth and strengthening of local government authority to enact positive change.

THE COMMUNITIES DISCRIMINATED ON WORK AND DESCENT recommended expanding scholarships to countries in the Global South to ensure quality education for all disenfranchised communities.

Looking at the 2020 targets: Implementation and review

Moderating this session, Manish Bapna, World Resources Institute, polled participants if the 21 targets that matured in 2020 should be updated to mirror the corresponding targets that are being developed in relevant intergovernmental processes. Responses showed 80% of participants supported an update.

David Donoghue, ODI Distinguished Fellow, former co-facilitator of the negotiations on the 2030 Agenda, cautioned about updating SDG targets, reminding participants about the delicate balance achieved during the negotiations, and noting this could risk dismantling the 2030 Agenda.

Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), noted that the CBD had learned from the challenges in achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and is building on this in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. She mentioned that the framework would include a reporting, monitoring and accountability structure, which was missing from the Aichi Targets. She agreed that updating the 2020 targets would risk watering down the SDGs.

Peter Thomson, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, agreed on the risks involved with updating established SDG targets. He emphasized that not achieving some targets included in SDG 14 (life under water), such as management of marine ecosystems and sustainable harvesting of fish, does not diminish efforts, since achieving these is "perpetual work." He believes that target 14.6 on removal of harmful fisheries subsidies could be met by 2021.

Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary, UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), stressed the role of regional cooperation on issues such as sustainable forest management, road safety, infrastructure, and youth development. She mentioned that the regional economic commissions support updating the 2020 targets, but will accept what is agreed by Member States.

Jean Todt, UN Special Envoy for Road Safety, called for more countries to report on target 3.6 (road safety), noting the 1.4 million road deaths per year and that this is the number one cause of death of children and young people. He called for an extension of the target deadline to 2030.

Alice Ruhweza, Africa Regional Director, World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), said the SDGs cannot be met by 2030 without a new relationship between people and nature. She highlighted the need for increased monitoring, political ambition, and financing, such as payments for ecosystem services, to ensure a nature-positive and carbon-neutral world.

Javier Surasky, Together 2030 Stakeholder Group, drew attention to evidence-based decision making and the importance of the civil society voice.

In the discussion, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION emphasized that 90% of road deaths occur in low- and middle- income countries, and stressed the need for increased capacity building and public-private partnerships. BELGIUM expressed interest in updating targets while maintaining the integrity of the 2030 Agenda.

FINLAND suggested separating targets into three groups: 1) thematic body and experts exist; 2) thematic body exists without experts; 3) no thematic body and no experts. She asked the Secretariat to prepare an analysis of targets and how they might be addressed, emphasizing the need to keep the 2030 Agenda "alive and up to date." SWITZERLAND said intergovernmental processes need to deliver on the 2020 targets, which should be updated to reflect greater ambition for 2030.

The EU stated that the HLPF review process agreed to continue review of the 2020 targets. He stressed not re-opening the 2030 Agenda and never lowering ambition. A youth delegate from DENMARK called for leaders to prioritize and finance the achievement of the SDGs, including sustainable energy, nature conservation, strong institutions, and support from developed to developing countries. GUATEMALA emphasized partnerships and the need for statistical information. INDONESIA stressed the mobilization of knowledge and multi-stakeholder participation.

SDGs in focus: How do we revamp and transform consumption and production and address and mitigate climate change?

Heather Page, UNDESA, presented the elements from the Secretary-General's report on progress towards SDGs 12 (responsible consumption and production), 13 (climate action), and 17 (partnerships). She noted: 1 million plastic drinking bottles are purchased every minute; 5 trillion single-use plastic bags are thrown away each year; the global material footprint increased by 70% between 2000 and 2017; greenhouse gas concentrations reached record highs in 2020; and foreign direct investment dropped by up to 40%, and is below USD 1 trillion for the first time since 2005.

Participants then watched a video prepared by children and youth demanding climate action.

Panel Discussion 1: Moderator Jennifer Morris, CEO, The Nature Conservancy, said the Secretary-General's report presents a shocking picture—"we are not getting it right." She called for more recovery funding that can be classified as low carbon and nature positive, highlighting the Leaders' Pledge for Nature.

Bruno Oberle, Director General, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), focused on the importance of agriculture and forestry, which contribute greenhouse gas emissions and cause 80% of biodiversity loss. He said IUCN is asking all authorities responsible for investing in response measures to reserve 10% for supporting nature.

Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, said we cannot deny the obvious: nations are far behind in implementing the Paris Agreement. She stressed the need to transition away from fossil fuels and high-emission economies. She said boosting partnerships is inclusive multilateralism; more voices mean more climate solutions, which will also enable achieving the SDGs.

Nikhil Hirdaramani, Hirdaramani International Group, Sri Lanka, emphasized that COVID-19 demonstrated the current model of supply chains does not work and the need to redefine the way we shop and conduct business.

Louise Mabulo, UN Young Champion of the Earth, Philippines, encouraged the promotion of food sovereignty while empowering youth and local farmers who should be viewed as equal partners in sustainable production strategies.

Rodrigo Rodriguez Tornquist, Secretary of Climate Change, Sustainable Development and Innovation, Argentina, outlined how his country is increasing its commitment to address the three environmental crises. He noted that Argentina is basing its national strategy on SDG 12 on scientific and technical guidance.

Annika Jacobson, State Secretary to the Minister for Environment and Climate, Sweden, outlined her country's commitment to promoting a circular economy and enhancing funding to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss. She noted that Sweden will host the Stockholm+50 conference in June 2022, which will be an important milestone to reflect global efforts since 1972 and the challenges ahead.

Virginijus Sinkevičius, European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, stated a circular economy is a means to curb the extraction of raw materials, use of single-use plastics, and avoid food waste.

In the discussion, FRANCE explained how it engaged citizens to contribute proposals for a new climate change law. INDONESIA called for the integration of economic, environmental, and social policies to achieve the SDGs. The DANISH YOUTH COUNCIL stressed the importance of educating young people to promote and enact sustainable consumption and production practices. THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES MAJOR GROUP said countries must engage and enhance local authorities to achieve greener economies.

FINLAND highlighted its new circular economy strategy that aims to achieve carbon neutrality by 2035. GUYANA called for increased efforts to meet the Paris Agreement goals, noting partnerships and international cooperation is key. GUATEMALA stated that the integration of new social attitudes is necessary for more sustainable consumption and production practices centered on nature-based solutions.

THE WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP noted that we are in the midst of multiple crises and gender perspectives need to be taken into account when thinking of solutions. BANGLADESH presented its commitments on biodiversity and climate change, noting it is ecologically fragile and vulnerable to climate change. SWITZERLAND suggested that more effective governance tools are needed to combat the three environmental crises. He called for

launching negotiations on plastics pollution and scaled-up efforts on sustainable consumption and production.

Panel Discussion 2: Moderator Morris invited participants to address economic and social transformations to make consumption and production systems more sustainable.

Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary, UNECE, noted the importance of a circular economy and some of UNECE Member States' commitments, such as improving waste management and energy efficiency, and setting specific targets to incorporate circularity into supply chains.

Ligia Noronha, UNEP, said all signals show that sustainable consumption and production "is the way to go," and yet trends show that decoupling economic growth from sustainability is not happening.

Kossivi Adessou, Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction, discussed local and community efforts to tackle climate change in his country, Togo. He highlighted the value of local actors' knowledge as means to achieve stability.

Alexandre Leitão, Special Envoy for Climate Affairs, Portugal, highlighted Portugal's efforts to combat climate change, and the European Climate Law and the EU Adaptation Strategy. He stressed that the environmental crisis should be assessed in an integrated manner, including poverty and inequality.

In the discussion, MOROCCO presented their key achievements in climate change policy. CHINA highlighted their achievements, stressing that developed countries should continue taking the lead and honor their commitment to mobilize USD 100 billion per year to fight climate change. A member of a civil society organization from the Asia-Pacific region called for ending fossil fuel subsidies, and technology support for developing countries.

In the Cyber-Corridors

The HLPF Ministerial Declaration has become a bit of a political landmine over the past five years. From 2016-2018 the declaration was only adopted following a vote, something that is rare in UN sustainable development negotiations. During this period, issues including climate change, the right of self-determination of peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation, promotion of a universal, rule-based, multilateral trading system, and gender equality, led to a vote. In 2020, no Ministerial Declaration could be adopted since there was no consensus and no procedures for holding a virtual vote.

With this in mind, in February 2021 ECOSOC President Munir Akram appointed Amb. Jukka Salovaara (Finland) and Amb. Mohammed Hussein Bahr Aluloom (Iraq) to lead consultations on the 2021 Ministerial Declaration. After four months of discussions and negotiations, the draft declaration was put under the silence procedure on 2 July 2021. If no one "broke silence" (objected), the declaration would be presented to the HLPF Ministerial Segment on 15 July. The news on 6 July that the silence procedure was broken, while a disappointment, did not come as much of a surprise. Consultations will continue, according to the co-facilitators.