

HLPF 2024 Highlights: Tuesday, 9 July 2024

As High-level Political Forum (HLPF) delegates embarked on a review of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2), they confronted the most basic human vulnerabilities and societal costs of a global systemic failure, now exacerbated by the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Some observers were struck by the pathos in the conference room as the familiar decorum of the proceedings was belied by the epic scale of the tragedy of world hunger and poverty, and reports of the “weaponization” of starvation. Delegates addressed the complex, multidimensional nature of these Global Goals and their inherent linkages to gender, conflict, insecurity, agriculture, the economy, human rights, and failings in the multilateral system itself.

SDGs in Focus: SDG 1 and interlinkages with other SDGs - No poverty

This session, co-chaired by Bob Rae, ECOSOC Vice-President (Canada) and Tarek Ladeb, ECOSOC Vice-President (Tunisia), considered innovative solutions for eradicating poverty and responses to various crises that can be replicated and scaled up. With 9% of the world’s population, or 712 million people, living in extreme poverty, and warnings that certain aspects of this Goal have gone into reverse, the session focused on the multidimensional nature of poverty.

Co-chair Rae recalled that the [SDGs Report 2024](#) highlights that none of the SDG 1 targets are on track to be achieved by 2030. Sokunpanha You, Statistics Division, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), noted that current trends will lead to 590 million people still living in extreme poverty by 2030.

Rola Dashti, Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, reported that over half of the people living in poverty globally are in Africa, with the region therefore unlikely to reach SDG 1 targets by 2030 in any realistic scenario. Shahra Razavi, Director, Department for Universal Social Protection, International Labour Organization, cautioned that targeted social protection measures, as opposed to universal ones, can often exclude beneficiaries who qualify due to a lack of data and administrative capacity.

Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, and Head, UN Human Rights Office in New York, observed that “poverty has a woman’s face” and called for prioritized spending to meet human rights obligations.

Sabina Alkire, Director, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, University of Oxford, highlighted what countries such as Colombia, India, and the Maldives are getting right in their efforts to tackle the multiple dimensions of poverty. Luis Felipe López-Calva, Global Director, Poverty and Equity Global Practice, World Bank Group, called for inclusive economic growth. Leonidas Iza Salazar, President, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, called for action to tackle fiscal injustice in pursuit of wealth redistribution, pointing to the “absurd” situation where a group of private corporations can amass greater wealth than Chile and Ecuador combined.

Lead discussant Vercilene Dias, Founder, National Network of Quilombola Lawyers, Brazil, highlighted the close link between poverty and structural racism and segregation, and called for a specific reference to this in the HLPF Ministerial Declaration. Participants were invited to engage in a general discussion.

STAKEHOLDER GROUP FOR COMMUNITIES DISCRIMINATED ON WORK AND DESCENT underlined that discrimination contributes to intergenerational poverty in affected communities, and called for expanded social protection and gender-responsive policies.

ALGERIA stressed the crucial role of South-South cooperation. SOUTH AFRICA, MALAYSIA, and CHINA shared national and regional initiatives, such as programmes and policies to expand reach and increase expenditure on social and infrastructural services to improve quality of life and income, and databases to target interventions.

UGANDA highlighted the provision of affordable credit, especially for women, and support for value addition in the agriculture and rural sectors. SWITZERLAND stressed that despite its privileged status, hidden poverty persists.

The EU noted its commitment to give collectively between 0.15% and 0.20% of the EU gross national income (GNI) to least developed countries (LDCs) in the short term and 0.20% by 2030.

GERMANY highlighted intersections and linkages between SDGs relating to gender equality and ending poverty and hunger, and stressed that economic growth must be promoted

within planetary boundaries. TANZANIA and TIMOR LESTE noted that addressing the root causes of poverty requires policies designed to address synergies across the SDGs. The FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UN (FAO) emphasized that while agri-food systems are pivotal in combating poverty, they also face challenges from political instability, conflict, and climate change. THAILAND highlighted benefits arising from policies strengthening rural and sustainable economies, namely fostering cultural and traditional knowledge preservation.

Several countries recommended policy approaches to take account of the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. GUATEMALA underlined the need for an evidence-based, multi-dimensional approach, that directly targets households and communities, to guide public policies. CHILE called for a multifaceted approach, also highlighting gender-responsive policies. A number of participants addressed debt restructuring and forgiveness, including the HOLY SEE. He lamented that many countries are forced to divert expenditure on essential service provision to debt repayments.

The SENDAI STAKEHOLDER MECHANISM called for addressing the causes of poverty through education, ending gender-based violence, and learning from local communities and Indigenous Peoples.

Several delegates reported on successful measures to tackle poverty. BRAZIL highlighted the expansion of social protection programmes since 2022, benefitting more than 21 million families. INDIA reported on its success in reducing multidimensional poverty for 415 million people since 2005 and offered to share its experience with other countries. FINLAND highlighted major gains in tackling gender inequality, as well as its approach towards eliminating homelessness by 2027 through a “systemic housing-first approach.” SAUDI ARABIA, GHANA, BOTSWANA, and others shared examples of progress in implementing economic and social reforms. IRELAND urged for policies that reflect the interdependencies of the SDGs, and underlined that younger generations face the brunt of poverty and require targeted policy support. ESWATINI reported on measures to reduce extreme poverty, including increased investment in social protection, especially for persons living with disabilities.

BRAZIL announced the upcoming launch of a Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty at the G20 Summit in November 2024. In further interventions, COLOMBIA, the PHILIPPINES, GUATEMALA, MEXICO, MADAGASCAR, ZIMBABWE, and others raised related issues, including:

- the need to address political will and structural factors such as neoliberalism;
- the importance of addressing in-country poverty policies as an international strategy;
- the need to raise public awareness of the SDGs and the interdependence of SDG 1 with other Goals.

In closing remarks, Iza Salazar called for citizens to hold their governments to account for delivering on the SDGs. López-Calva underlined that multilateralism is the only effective way forward. Alkire encouraged the use of metrics to guide action, track trends, and recognize successes. Brands Kehris underlined that the multiple dimensions of poverty are an “assault” on a range of human rights. Moderator Razavi noted that “an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure.”

SDGs in Focus: SDG 2 and interlinkages with other SDGs – Zero hunger

In 2022, between 691 and 783 million people faced hunger, while 2.4 billion people were moderately to severely food insecure. In this session, participants explored the complex linkages with trends in the global economy, finance, poverty, security, and geopolitics, and efforts to align policy responses with the triple planetary crisis.

Opening the discussion, Chair Paula Narváez, ECOSOC President, characterized progress on this SDG as sobering.

Faryal Ahmed, Statistics Division, UN DESA, outlined key messages from the Secretary-General’s report on the SDGs. Noting persistent global food insecurity in the face of multiple global crises, she reported an estimated 20% of children under five will suffer from stunting in 2030.

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, stressed the importance of regional action to harness expertise and collaboration for holistic and innovative solutions.

Opening the interactive panel discussion, Moderator Afshan Khan, Coordinator, Scaling Up Nutrition Movement, stressed that malnutrition disproportionately affects women and youth.

Iain Wright, Vice Chair, Steering Committee of the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, said intersecting global crises have exposed the vulnerabilities of our food systems, citing the loss of 10% of Africa’s GDP annually due to child stunting. Inaya Ezzedine, Member of Parliament, Lebanon, discussed the links between conflict and food insecurity, and called for the right to food to be reinforced in national and international legislation and accountability frameworks.

Pointing to the rise of non-communicable diseases, Aline Mosnier, Scientific Director, FABLE Pathways Consortium, France, called for more coherent policies to account for the hidden costs of unhealthy food.

Michal Mlynár, Acting Executive Director, UN Human Settlements Programme, underlined interlinkages between urbanization and food systems, especially in intermediary cities that act as nodes to connect people and socio-economic activities across rural and urban territories.

Lead discussant Meena Pokhrel, Nepal Agriculture Co-operative Central Federation, representing Farmers Major Group, called for:

- support for sustainable production, noting this cost cannot be borne by farmers alone;

- investment in agriculture and farmer training, to increase production and productivity; and
- an open, fair, and rules-based global trading system that provides farmers with stable market access.

Lead discussant Stefanos Fotiou, Director, Office of Sustainable Development Goals, FAO, noted the need to increase investment in both agri-food system transformation and climate action, highlighting the FAO's [Global Roadmap on Achieving SDG 2 without breaching the 1.5°C Threshold](#). He called for sustainable natural resource management through, for instance, geospatial targeting to reduce food loss.

In the subsequent discussion, many delegates highlighted national and sub-national programmes to eliminate hunger and transform food systems, including school feeding programmes, integrated nutrition and health policies, and agro-entrepreneurship. While some showcased progress in areas such as “whole-of-food” systems and agroecology, recurring themes were the lack of access to finance, credit, and capacity.

The NGO MAJOR GROUP called for: whole-of-food system approaches that support youth, rural women, and other groups; a shift to agroecology and plant-rich diets; and elimination of distortive subsidies that promote exploitation of workers. SWITZERLAND also highlighted whole-of-society approaches and stressed the need to combat all forms of malnutrition, including obesity. THAILAND and UGANDA underlined efforts to adopt agroecology and related initiatives linking agricultural productivity to climate resilience and improved health and nutrition outcomes.

ITALY emphasized that food security is a priority under his country's current G7 presidency and, with GERMANY and the HOLY SEE, highlighted partnerships and initiatives towards achieving the right to adequate food and nutrition. ISRAEL noted the contribution of technological advances in addressing food insecurity. NORWAY noted that a free and just market can drive food production up and costs down. SPAIN linked the universal right to adequate food to strengthened value chains, scaled-up regenerative agricultural practices, and bolstered social protections.

On conflict and food insecurity, the ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION PARTICIPATION MECHANISM underlined the devastating impact of ongoing conflicts on hunger. She pointed to the multiple and interconnected causes of food insecurity, cautioning that hunger cannot be eradicated in a silo. The PHILIPPINES called for broader responsibility-sharing, namely for tackling diminished fish stocks and conflict-induced food insecurity. PALESTINE decried the weaponization of hunger and starvation as instruments of devastation in Gaza, and outlined community action to revive Gaza's development through, among others, conservation efforts to address severe food and water shortages.

On food security, ALGERIA noted the importance of achieving self-sufficiency in building resilient food systems. MOROCCO emphasized applying an integrated, multidimensional approach. GHANA highlighted her country's import substitution agenda to combat reliance on imported food product.

GUATEMALA reported on building a dignified agricultural sector and resilient food system.

TIMOR LESTE, the US, UKRAINE, and IRELAND underscored the close link between conflict, food insecurity, and poverty, and called for increased global solidarity and partnerships to strengthen the resilience of food systems. ZAMBIA noted developing countries have experienced crop failure, especially for staple foods that are not disaster resilient. He urged crop diversification to more resilient foods, as well as smart insurance for small-scale farmers. The SOVEREIGN ORDER OF MALTA described initiatives such as supporting establishment of farmer cooperatives in South Sudan to promote a more sustainable approach to food production. INDONESIA underscored the role of localizing food production.

A number of countries, including the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, highlighted the role of digital transformation and research in addressing food challenges. FRANCE called for digital solutions to document traceability of “farm to table” to encourage sustainability and healthy foods.

CHILE and SOUTH AFRICA underscored the role of civil society and other food system actors, especially at the local level. BRAZIL outlined efforts to improve family farming, underlining its role in providing fresh or minimally processed foods.

COLOMBIA stressed the need to focus on immediate short-term hunger relief rather than long-term policies, as “hunger is now.” The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC supported direct approaches in increasing the profitability of food production systems, and with ZIMBABWE, noted the significant challenges to food security posed by climate change.

In closing remarks, Moderator Khan underlined that financing and investment towards building nutrition resilience is key. Mosnier welcomed the efforts showcased to lift populations above the hunger threshold in the face of multiple and compounding crises. Wright emphasized the interdependence of SDGs 1 and 2, and with Mlynár, underlined that mobilizing finance and resources is critical. Ezzedine urged for an end to weaponizing food and water, and called for holistic, outcome-based monitoring mechanisms to build resilient food systems.

In The Corridors

On a day devoted to what many consider to be two of the most fundamental SDGs – eradicating poverty and ending hunger – some delegates expressed frustration that energy levels in formal discussion spaces seemed low, given the urgency and scale of the challenges at hand. “I've been coming to this process for years, but the closer we get to 2030, the more disappointment I feel about these discussions' business-as-usual tone” said one civil society observer. Some delegates were nevertheless more optimistic, pointing to the exchange of voluntary national reviews in the days to come, which “always offers an opportunity for sharing and learning” from one another's experiences and ambitions. And perhaps, as is the case with other multilateral processes, the real energy is filling the corridors, virtual spaces, and in-person events happening outside the conference rooms.

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