

HLPF 2024 Highlights: Wednesday, 10 July 2024

Participants at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) embarked on their review of the Sustainable Development Goal on climate action (SDG 13) and its critical interlinkages that must inform consideration of other SDGs. The UN Secretary-General has described climate action as the 21st century's greatest opportunity to drive forward all the Goals. Conversely, delegates were warned that failure to halt climate change will make the other Goals unreachable. This dynamic relationship with other parts of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was evident as participants proceeded to engage with panels on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and the implementation of the outcomes of the Fourth SIDS Conference (SIDS 4), and on local action and transformation from the ground up.

SDGs in Focus: SDG 13 and interlinkages with other SDGs – Climate Action

Opening this segment in the morning, Tarek Ladeb, Vice-President (Tunisia), UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), noted that the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement in 2015 had established a strong foundation for coherent implementation of climate action and sustainable development. He invited speakers to consider ways in which accelerated progress on climate action can be an enabler for addressing the interconnected crises of nature, biodiversity, and pollution, alongside poverty, inequality, and sustainable development.

Heather Page, Statistics Division, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), introduced key points from the UN Secretary-General's 2024 SDG Report, including:

- in 2022, global greenhouse gas emissions reached a new record of 57.4 gigatons of CO₂ equivalent;
- keeping warming to 1.5°C calls for a 42% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030;
- current national policies set the world on track for 3°C warming; and
- climate finance increased by 30% from 2021 to reach USD 115.9 billion in 2022, meeting the developed country goal to raise USD 100 billion annually by 2020 and through 2025.

Tatiana Molcean, Executive Secretary, UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) described how urgent action on climate change can positively impact other SDGs, including on water, poverty, energy, and employment. She highlighted, among others, opportunities for the African region to optimize resource use; and the need for the Latin America and the Caribbean region to access low-carbon technologies to tap their lithium reserves.

Katherine Calvin, Chief Scientist, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and Co-Chair, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group III, drew insights

from the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report. She highlighted the need for the energy, transport, and industry sectors to halve their emissions by 2030; the availability of multiple low-cost solutions; and synergies between mitigation options and sustainable development.

Introducing the panel discussion, Moderator Britt Groosman, Vice President, Climate-Smart Agriculture, Environmental Defense Fund, noted that the world has set several temperature records while making no significant progress on SDG 13 targets. She emphasized the need for decoupling economic growth from the carbon economy to achieve progress on other SDGs.

Axel Schmidt Graef, Mayor of Niterói, Brazil, underscored the critical role of cities in addressing climate action. He described his city's investments in the resilience of informal settlements and disaster prevention, and commended the work of the Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships.

Maria Mähl, Partner and Head, USA ESG Solutions, ESG Book, observed that the potential of financial markets to influence corporate decarbonization remains unfulfilled. She highlighted the need for enhanced disclosure of Scope 3 carbon emissions that can account for 90% of company emissions and called for enhanced diagnostics for corporate disclosure protocols.

Lead discussant Miquel Muñoz Cabré, Senior Scientist, Stockholm Environment Institute US, challenged participants to commit to a just transition, ensuring that climate adaptation and mitigation actions benefit vulnerable groups. Lead discussant Faisal Alfadl, Secretary General, Saudi Green Building Forum, emphasized that access to data and multi-partner collaboration are crucial for decarbonizing the built environment.

In general discussions, delegates highlighted the growing impact of climate-related disasters across the world and shared national and regional initiatives designed to boost climate action. CHILE urged renewed multilateralism and cooperation of all sectors of society to accomplish climate goals. GUATEMALA and CHINA emphasized the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

In the context of disaster and risk reduction, TANZANIA stressed the need to maximize synergies while minimizing trade-offs, and with the PHILIPPINES, ARMENIA, and MALAWI, called for increased finance and coordinated action for vulnerable regions. The UN OFFICE FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION highlighted the role of disaster and risk reduction in bolstering community and infrastructural resilience. ESWATINI stressed the need for more ambitious disaster risk reduction for progress across interlinked SDGs.

Many delegates, including NEPAL and GHANA, underlined that limited finance and capacity are key challenges for many countries, and called for increased international cooperation. TIMOR LESTE outlined her country's national adaptation plan,

which relies heavily on international support. IRELAND noted that while public finance is a key element, other innovative means of finance need to be identified. NORWAY reiterated her country's commitment to tripling support for adaptation by 2026, and the REPUBLIC OF KOREA recalled his country's recent pledge to contribute USD 7 million to the Fund for responding to loss and damage.

The UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES highlighted the recently adopted Climate Action Multistakeholder Pledge that aims to improve the resilience of refugees and displaced persons to climate impacts. The UN ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME emphasized the need to address high interest rates and capital costs, fossil fuel subsidies, and debt servicing.

SWITZERLAND urged all actors, including the financial sector, to contribute to climate action. GERMANY noted that biodiversity and climate finance are two sides of the same coin, stressing that "insufficient climate action is the most expensive action." The EU welcomed country-led integrated financial frameworks aiming to mobilize finance in line with national priorities. The INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF NATURE, INDONESIA, and MALAWI called for prioritizing, among other areas, climate-smart infrastructure, social protection, and an enabling environment for green investments. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION urged for developing reliable global carbon emissions trading systems.

Noting agrifood systems are a major contributor to climate change, the FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UN lamented the "alarmingly low" levels of climate finance allocated to the sector and urged harnessing their immense potential to reduce emissions. PORTUGAL highlighted the need for integrated action on marine ecosystems.

The INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP cautioned that apparent climate solutions do not always address root causes, underlining an often-unjust energy transition. SOUTH AFRICA underscored the need to allow policy space for developing countries to craft just transition pathways.

UKRAINE stressed the significant emissions caused by military operations in her country, calling on the international community to cease current wars and prevent future ones. FINLAND described investment in peace and security as climate action, with AUSTRIA highlighting contributions to UN work on the climate-security nexus. The WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP cautioned efforts, such as net zero pledges, that simply "tinker around the edges" without transforming underlying systems. The INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAW ORGANIZATION (IDLO) advocated for a feminist lens to examine the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice.

FRANCE and FINLAND highlighted the role of cities and municipalities in meeting climate-related targets. POLAND urged people-centered international cooperation. The CHILDREN AND YOUTH MAJOR GROUP noted the role of artificial intelligence (AI), highlighting the AI Innovation Grand Challenge that promotes AI for climate action. IRELAND noted that achieving SDG 13 requires skills, knowledge, and innovative ideas.

The US highlighted its USD 3 billion annual funding for climate-related services. BRAZIL discussed a G20 taskforce to promote sustainability planning. Several delegations seized the opportunity to further highlight policies and technologies. The INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY noted the potential of pairing small modular reactors with renewable energy sources to support climate adaptation. YEMEN outlined national efforts to implement early warning systems. The COUNCIL OF PALM OIL PRODUCING COUNTRIES highlighted the potential of palm oil as an efficient and low-carbon form of biodiesel.

COLOMBIA reported national bans on coal exports and fracking. ALBANIA reiterated her country's commitment to reducing emissions through a circular economy that includes targeted solutions to address plastic pollution.

Small Island Developing States: Implementing the Outcomes of the Fourth SIDS Conference

In the afternoon, Ivan Simonović, Vice-President, ECOSOC (Croatia), chaired this segment, which addressed next steps in implementing the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS: A Renewed Declaration for Resilient Prosperity (ABAS), adopted at SIDS 4 in May 2024. The Declaration defines actions in ten thematic areas, including economic resilience, climate action, disaster risk reduction, data, science, and digitalization.

Gaston Browne, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, described how, in the wake of SIDS 4, the Caribbean has been devastated by Hurricane Beryl, the earliest-forming Category 5 hurricane on record during any season in the Atlantic. He noted that Hurricane Beryl is clear evidence of the "unabated warming of the planet as a result of large polluters," and described how the subsequent challenges and a perpetual state of vulnerability are compounded by the burden of debt. Browne called for swift implementation of ABAS, prioritizing access to finance, a reporting and monitoring mechanism, and a SIDS center of excellence.

Naomi Matapta, Prime Minister of Samoa, said Hurricane Beryl has reduced seemingly prosperous islands into unimaginable hardship. She noted that ABAS enshrines a collective commitment to ensure that the smallest and most vulnerable are not left behind in a world of want, injustice, and conflict, and urged international financial institutions and UN funds and agencies to mainstream SIDS priorities.

Li Junhua, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, UN DESA, and Secretary-General, SIDS 4, expressed heartfelt solidarity with the people of the Caribbean and delivered key messages from SIDS 4, including:

- SIDS are at a critical juncture in their ongoing battle with sea-level rise, accessing development finance, and living with unsustainable debt;
- the UN should focus on capacity-building needs, working across ABAS and the SDGs; and
- UN DESA is collaborating on an evaluation and monitoring tool to deliver ABAS.

Introducing the panel, moderator Ali Naseer Mohamed, Permanent Representative of Maldives to the UN, recalled his experience of the UN SAMOA Pathway, and urged a focus on practical action on ABAS rather than more "wish lists."

Rabab Fatima, High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and SIDS (UN-OHRLS), and Special Adviser, SIDS 4, said the destruction caused by Hurricane Beryl underscores the need for urgency and coordinated action across the UN System. She called for:

- integrating ABAS commitments into the strategic priorities and plans of respective UN entities;
- developing a robust monitoring and evaluation framework;
- strengthening SIDS national focal points; and
- providing sustainable, innovative, and targeted financing that considers SIDS' vulnerabilities.

Natalia Kanem, Executive Director, UN Population Fund, highlighted her agency's support for integrated programming and high-quality geospatial data to identify who is most vulnerable, and enable outcome monitoring.

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, outlined some policy priorities in ABAS implementation, including: supporting the long-term resilience of coastal ecosystems; promoting healthy lifestyles and preventive healthcare due to a rise in non-communicable diseases; investing in sustainable livelihoods; and enhancing island connectivity.

Lead discussant Dima Al-Khatib, Director, UN Office for South-South Cooperation, underscored the role of knowledge and South-South exchanges to advance ABAS, highlighting the pivotal role of national and regional UN networks. Nandini Tanya Lallmon, African Queer Youth Initiative, Mauritius, called for recognition of the intersectional vulnerabilities faced by LGBTI+ individuals and urged their full representation in all SDG processes.

In ensuing discussions, many delegates expressed solidarity with those affected by Hurricane Beryl. Saint Kitts and Nevis, for the CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY, called for international support for official development assistance and concessional development financing. JAMAICA urged adequate provision and mobilization of all means of implementation to support ABAS and the development of its monitoring and evaluation framework.

INDIA, ITALY, the US, MOROCCO, the UK, PORTUGAL, TANZANIA, the EU, FINLAND, GERMANY, LATVIA, the INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY, NEW ZEALAND, and others highlighted ongoing collaborative partnerships and reiterated political and financial commitments to support ABAS over the coming decade.

The PHILIPPINES called for increased financial support, concessional loans, and debt relief. The HOLY SEE urged for radical action by developed countries on debt cancellation. WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP stressed the need for increased access to grant-based finance and concessional loans, alongside gender-responsive policies. The SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGICAL COMMUNITY MAJOR GROUP underscored the importance of building human capital in SIDS, lamenting that funding opportunities often have requirements out of alignment with SIDS' needs or priorities.

NORWAY welcomed lessons to be learned and shared during the upcoming Voluntary National Review presentations, particularly on using the multidimensional vulnerability index.

The CHILDREN AND YOUTH MAJOR GROUP stressed that sustainable development is impossible without a skilled SIDS workforce. TIMOR LESTE noted the importance of developing measuring and monitoring tools. The IDLO stressed the importance of the rule of law being enshrined in the ABAS Declaration, emphasizing that people-centered justice systems can protect the rights of the most marginalized and vulnerable.

In closing remarks, moderator Naseer Mohamed emphasized the need for multi-level integration of ABAS into cooperation frameworks, national development plans, and strategic plans.

Transformation from the ground up: Acting at the local level

Bob Rae, ECOSOC Vice-President (Canada), chaired this final session, which focused on local and regional-level actions to accelerate implementation of the SDGs. Moderator Emilia Saiz, Secretary General, United Cities and Local Governments, stressed poverty must be addressed at the local level, and marginalized communities must have the opportunity to participate in discussions that affect their future.

Bandiougou Diawara, President, Regional Council of Kayes, Mali, urged states to give more priority and attention to local authorities, underlining the local level is where action to implement the SDGs happens.

Tatiana Molcean, Executive Secretary, ECE, noted voluntary local reviews (VLRs) have proven to be a powerful tool for addressing inequalities, as they not only fill data gaps but also influence local development plans and budgets in line with SDG frameworks. She drew attention to the Cities Summit of the Future scheduled for September 2024.

Lead discussant Cielito Perez, Executive Director, Center for Women's Resources, the Philippines, urged supporting innovative grassroots actions and solutions provided by marginalized communities.

Lead discussant Bernd Vöhringer, Vice-President, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, highlighted the European Charter of Local Self-Government as an example of instruments and tools that give local authorities "a real place at the table" and foster inclusive decision making at the local level.

In the ensuing general discussion, SRI LANKA noted the success of the SDGs hinges on the active engagement and participation of local communities. SPAIN noted that SDG localization implies a bottom-up approach, calling for policy coherence to meet the top-down efforts of global action.

WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS MAJOR GROUP discussed the contribution of trade unions in advancing territorialization of the 2030 Agenda. The STAKEHOLDER GROUP FOR COMMUNITIES DISCRIMINATED ON WORK AND DESCENT underlined the SDGs will not be met unless local governments prioritize the empowerment and participation of marginalized communities.

The LGBTI STAKEHOLDER GROUP decried countries enacting discriminating policies that further marginalize and endanger LGBTI+ communities, and called for decriminalizing same-sex relations to enable these communities to safely take on their roles in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Delegates also shared examples of local SDG action. GERMANY outlined how the city of Kiel used its VLR process to strengthen communication and local ownership of the SDGs. FINLAND and ARGENTINA highlighted the contribution of their VLR processes to mobilizing and engaging citizens. Citing the first VLR conducted by Strasbourg, FRANCE underscored the role of culture in achieving the SDGs. IRELAND emphasized the importance of local youth innovation and advocacy. ITALY, NORWAY, and MALAYSIA highlighted how they are integrating multiple VLRs and other initiatives to strengthen joint learning and multilevel governance.

Moderator Saiz encouraged delegates to build capacity for self-representation by local government actors in global-level policy development, including during the Summit of the Future in August this year.

In The Corridors

Representatives of the Major Groups and other Stakeholders attending the HLPF have been commenting on the apparent impact of the liquidity crisis - "austerity" - at the United Nations. Observers have noted how a reduced central budget to sponsor the participation of youth delegates and others has led to their reduced presence in and around the conference deliberations. Whereas the groups would normally expect to have up to 25 funded places, cuts in the budget have resulted in only five centrally funded participants.

One participant noted the irony that while discussions on Wednesday touched on "transformation from the ground up," restrictions in support for civil society participation "cuts across a core commitment in the SDGs themselves."

