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**Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity  
of all – our responsibility, our opportunity**  
Stockholm, 2 and 3 June 2022

## **Leadership dialogue 2: Achieving a sustainable and inclusive recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic**

### **Background paper by the Secretariat**

#### **I. About the leadership dialogues**

1. Stockholm+50, the international meeting to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of the holding of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in June 1972, is both a commemoration and a time for bold action and engagement. It presents an opportunity to reflect and connect, and to accelerate and scale actions for a better future on a healthy planet with prosperity for all.
2. The importance of a healthy planet for human progress and prosperity is highlighted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and has been underscored by the continuing crisis caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. A degraded planet imposes limits on well-being and prosperity, creating obstacles to a better future. The concept note entitled “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity”<sup>1</sup> is an introduction to the global challenge of achieving a healthy planet and to opportunities for expressing renewed commitment at the international meeting.
3. The aim of the Stockholm+50 leadership dialogues is to engage governments, international organizations, business and industry, civil-society organizations – including organizations for young people, women, indigenous peoples and local communities, and rural communities – and other relevant stakeholders in an exchange of ideas on opportunities to overcome barriers to implementation, connect actions, and create new, intergenerational pathways for change to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
4. The present background paper reflects the discussions that took place during the first round of informal working group meetings in March 2022 and the interventions of Member States and of Major Groups and Stakeholders of the United Nations Environment Programme during the Stockholm+50 preparatory meeting held on 28 March 2022 in New York under the auspices of the General Assembly. Key messages from the preparatory meeting that are relevant to all three leadership dialogues include an emphasis on the engagement of groups of young people and the central importance of intergenerational equity in the potential outcomes of the international meeting.

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<sup>1</sup> A/CONF.238/3.

5. Leadership dialogue 2, whose theme is “Achieving a sustainable and inclusive recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic”, will address the specific actions needed to build back from the pandemic and its adverse impacts on people, the planet and prosperity and to put the world back on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

## II. The context and issues

6. Two years after COVID-19 first swept around the globe, countries and communities are still recovering from the effects of the pandemic and the national measures taken in response to it. More than 100 million jobs have been lost<sup>2</sup> or displaced in the formal and informal sectors, and trillions of dollars have been spent<sup>3</sup> to keep businesses, families and economies afloat. The pandemic has had devastating impacts on the world’s food security and nutrition – more than 800 million people in the world faced hunger in 2020, an increase of 160 million people compared with 2019.<sup>4</sup> Families and communities living in poverty and in vulnerable contexts now face even greater challenges to their survival. The pandemic has taken a disproportionate toll on women and girls, a situation that reflects the fragility of progress in achieving gender equality.<sup>5</sup> Many developing countries and households are facing growing levels of unmanageable debt. The world is more divided, unequal and unsustainable. Unfortunately, much of the unprecedented infusion of fiscal and monetary resources has only reinforced business as usual.<sup>6</sup> Population growth, urbanization, conflict, climate change, environmental degradation and increasingly unsustainable patterns of resource extraction, production and consumption are testing the Earth’s resilience. The rapidly deteriorating environment threatens not only social and economic well-being but also the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the protection of basic human rights.

7. The changing climate, biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, increasing levels of chemical pollution and waste, desertification, land degradation, floods and drought, and poverty, inequality and conflict are all closely related and need to be addressed synergistically. A sustainable, inclusive and green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic should be framed in the context of the triple planetary crisis and of global inequality. Recovery should also support and be guided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. Efforts are also needed to scale up resource efficiency and a circular economy, to ensure the transition to sustainable consumption and production in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, with particular consideration for developing countries. Pro-poor, gender-responsive, inclusive, rights-based approaches are key to ensuring progress towards environmental sustainability and sustainable development that benefits people and the planet.

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<sup>2</sup> International Labour Organization, “ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work”, 8th ed., “Updated estimates and analysis” (27 Oct. 2021).

<sup>3</sup> As tracked by the Global Recovery Observatory (<https://recovery.smithschool.ox.ac.uk/tracking/>).

<sup>4</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development, United Nations Children’s Fund, World Food Programme and World Health Organization, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021: Transforming Food Systems for Food Security, Improved Nutrition and Affordable Healthy Diets for All* (FAO: Rome, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), *Beyond COVID-19: A Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice* (2021).

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, *Are We Building Back Better? Evidence from 2020 and Pathways to Inclusive Green Recovery Spending* (2021).

## A. Actions for recovery in key sectors and value chains affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

8. Sustainable and inclusive recovery processes will need to focus on the high-impact sectors most affected by COVID-19, such as the food, energy and manufacturing sectors.<sup>7</sup> Concerted actions for recovery should aim towards overall improved management through systems-based approaches. The transformation will require thinking and acting beyond sectoral boundaries to address the main drivers of unsustainable practices and to adopt cost-effective, targeted interventions. In re-examining the transformation of key sectors, it will be important to rethink how to promote overall policy coherence in advancing circular economy approaches and sustainable consumption and production patterns; finance the transformation, including by providing support to developing countries; mitigate the socioeconomic impact of the process; inform and incentivize consumers; strengthen social safety nets; allocate resources to poverty alleviation; create jobs and improve job quality; rebalance access to basic services and social protection schemes for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises and the informal sector, including for women; strengthen public health and care services; build strong and resilient infrastructure; advance the digital transformation; and form partnerships and promote peer learning between countries.

9. Across high-impact sectors, it is equally important to provide for job creation, skill-building, technology cooperation, and capacity enhancement that builds more resilience at all levels to known and unknown challenges. These considerations are central to the just transition for all countries, especially the poorest, women, men and youth living in poverty and in vulnerable situations.<sup>8</sup>

10. Achieving a sustainable and inclusive recovery will require the planning and adoption of stimulus measures that are aligned with climate and biodiversity priorities and include nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches. This will increase the accountability of financial institutions and other key stakeholders with regard to the progress achieved in the transformation of key sectors and value chains affected by the pandemic.

## B. Harnessing innovation and technology, including digital technology, for transparency and disclosure

11. Prioritizing a shift towards sustainable consumption and production in high-impact sectors could achieve significant economic, social and environmental gains, often within short time frames. Recovery measures should include providing the innovative technologies required to support the transformation of high-impact sectors. Cooperation on green technologies is key in the context of sustainable recovery, but it is often hindered by the lack of human resources, access to technology and financing.

12. In that context, digitalization can accelerate sustainable recovery processes through the use of advanced and integrated data analytics for policy and investment decisions; new green finance mechanisms; radically increased transparency, traceability and accountability; better environmental management through granular and timely data; better stakeholder engagement; more informed consumers; and more sustainable and equitable lifestyle choices. However, digital technologies and innovation also have the potential to exacerbate existing inequalities and unsustainable behaviours and to cause a “rebound effect” on energy use, raw material consumption and the production of non-recyclable waste products. The digital transformation of the value chains of high-impact sectors must take into consideration and mitigate such negative consequences as well as those in the areas of e-literacy and skills, the digital divide in

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<sup>7</sup> M. Lenzen and others, “Implementing the material footprint to measure progress towards SDGs 8 and 12,” *Nature Sustainability* (9 Dec. 2021), and the following data sources: SCP Hotspot Analysis Tool results, available via <http://scp-hat.lifecycleinitiative.org/sector-profiles/>; International Resource Panel reports, available at <https://www.resourcepanel.org/reports>; Circle Economy, *The Circularity Gap Report 2022* (2022); United Nations Environment Programme, *Inclusive Wealth Report 2018* (2018); Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports, available at <https://www.ipcc.ch/reports/>; United Nations Environment Programme, *Emissions Gap Report 2021* (2021); Stockholm Environment Institute, International Institute for Sustainable Development, Overseas Development Institute, E3G and United Nations Environment Programme, *The Production Gap: 2021 Report* (Stockholm Environment Institute, 2021); United Nations Environment Programme, *GEO for Cities: Towards Green and Just Cities* (2021).

<sup>8</sup> International Labour Organization, *Guidelines for a Just Transition towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All* (2015).

connectivity and access to technologies, personal data protection and competition policy and other challenges of adopting new technologies, particularly in developing economies.

### C. Leveraging global, South-South and triangular cooperation

13. Overcoming global challenges will require stronger global partnerships. South-South and triangular cooperation are more essential than ever. Global cooperation will need to embrace technology co-development, cooperation and replication, enhanced infrastructure and skills, increased access to data, and knowledge exchange for capacity-building.

14. Enhanced cooperation can help developing countries learn from each other, grow more sustainably, close income gaps and build trust. At the same time, it will contribute towards a thriving and healthy planet that is sufficiently resilient to support inclusive and resilient human societies.

## III. Key messages and recommended urgent actions

***Message 1. A system-wide transformation of high-impact sectors is urgently required to accelerate the shift to more sustainable consumption and production, including through the adoption of circular economy approaches.***

(a) Sustainable and inclusive recovery interventions in high-impact sectors should target their carbon, nature, material and pollution footprints and their relationship to GDP and prosperity for all.

(b) The achievement of system-wide transformations should be guided by the specific economic and societal needs and circumstances of different regions and countries and supported by global partnerships.

(c) Responsible industries have a key role to play in scaling up collaboration with policymakers to co-develop and deploy solutions and to accelerate the transformation. To ensure a future with jobs and prosperity for all, it will be crucial to engage private-sector actors at the outset, and to ensure the broad participation of industry and private-sector stakeholders, including micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, in socioeconomic and environmental transformations.

(d) Micro, small- and medium-sized enterprises have suffered the most from the pandemic<sup>9</sup> and they should be further supported to recover and to be able to play a critical role in achieving an inclusive and transformative recovery.

(e) Sustainable agri-food systems are key to achieving an inclusive and sustainable recovery. They should become nature-positive, promote the welfare of smallholder farmers, tackle food waste, ensure the sustainable management of natural resources, implement the use of innovative technology and data, and deepen collaboration with the private sector for financing.

(f) Actions taken in the context of the recovery should increase the resilience of supply chains to future shocks, in particular for least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, and ensure their participation in the global trading system, in particular the participation of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises.

(g) Technical and financial support will be essential to accelerate the transition to low-carbon, resource-efficient, nature-positive, inclusive and resilient value chains.

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<sup>9</sup> International Trade Centre, *SME Competitiveness Outlook 2021: Empowering the Green Recovery* (2021).

**Message 2. Investment flows for a sustainable and inclusive recovery must be aligned with climate and biodiversity priorities and must address poverty, inequality, development and social security concerns in a context of increased accountability of financial institutions and other key stakeholders with regard to progress.**

(a) Delivering on commitments and related means of implementation is an essential element of reconstructing and enhancing trust and partnership as a basis for renewed multilateralism and global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development.

(b) A broad set of interventions is needed to create the enabling conditions for a sustainable and inclusive recovery process, including carbon reduction; continued progress towards the elimination of fossil fuels; restoration of ecosystems; promotion of sustainable consumption and production patterns; subsidy reform; green investment policies; targeted public procurement; a shift to alternative, green business models; and access to and mobilization of climate and nature finance.

(c) High-impact sectors should take on board social and policy innovations to enhance value and increase human well-being for all, drawing on innovative means of implementation that increase the strength of the social fabric and of safety nets.

(d) These interventions must also ensure that people acquire the skill sets needed for the economy of tomorrow, which will be digitally connected and will position countries, individuals and firms to add value while building circularity and resilience for a just transition.<sup>10</sup>

(e) Young people, women, rural communities, and indigenous peoples and local communities should play a central role in sustainable, inclusive, and resilient recovery processes.

(f) The recovery should promote inclusive leadership, with gender parity in institutions and gender mainstreaming in policies across all sectors, with the aim of creating sustainability and social justice for all.

**Message 3. Strengthened cooperation to provide access to green and digital technologies is fundamental to accelerate green recovery processes and to scale up, mainstream and monitor actions.**

(a) Cooperation is needed to provide access to green and digital technologies in order to accelerate the sustainable recovery. Such cooperation should include building capacity and improving access to technology and financing. It should also include the promotion, fostering and co-creation of research and development, the development of in-country technological capacity, including the enabling of local digital solutions, and the reduction of the cost of existing technologies.

(b) Digitalization in the context of the green recovery should enable radically increased digital access, transparency, traceability, sustainability, and accountability; better and broader stakeholder engagement; more informed consumers; and more sustainable and equitable lifestyle choices. The digital transformation should accelerate progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

(c) Harnessing the potential of digital technologies for better sustainability outcomes requires cooperation among governments, institutions, and other data producers and users. Taking full advantage of these opportunities will require policymakers, international organizations, business leaders and individuals to fundamentally rethink the digital revolution to ensure that it becomes a strategic asset and generates more inclusive, transparent and innovative outcomes.

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<sup>10</sup> International Labour Organization, *Guidelines for a Just Transition towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All* (2015).