



# Economic and Social Council

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## High-level political forum on sustainable development

Convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council  
9–18 July 2019

### **Summary by the President of the Economic and Social Council of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Council at its 2019 session**

#### **I. Introduction**

1. The high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council met from 9 to 18 July 2019 at United Nations Headquarters in New York. It included a three-day ministerial segment, from 16 to 18 July.
2. The forum examined progress in the context of the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”. It conducted an in-depth review of six Sustainable Development Goals, on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (Goal 4); promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (Goal 8); reducing inequality within and among countries (Goal 10); taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (Goal 13); promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (Goal 16); and strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (Goal 17). A total of 47 countries presented voluntary national reviews, of which 7 were presenting for the second time.
3. Discussions addressed the extensive activities undertaken in the past year to prepare for forum, including thematic reviews, regional preparatory forums, workshops on national voluntary reviews, stakeholder consultations, as well as the one-year cycle of the Council.
4. The high-level political forum constituted the conclusion of its first four-year review cycle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Goals. It provided an opportunity for States and stakeholders to take stock of how the forum had delivered on its functions in that regard and to reflect on how to strengthen the forum in the future.



5. The forum held in July will also serve to inform the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the General Assembly, to be held in September 2019, during which Heads of State and Government will gather at United Nations Headquarters to conduct their first four-year review of progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda and identify measures to accelerate the progress. The high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the General Assembly, along with the high-level events to be held during the same week in September – the climate summit called for by the Secretary-General; the high-level meeting on universal health coverage; the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development; and the high-level review to address progress made with regard to the follow-up to and implementation of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway – will provide an opportunity to embark upon a new decade of action and delivery.

6. The following participated at the forum: 100 ministers and vice-ministers; the heads of a number of entities of the United Nations system and other organizations; and more than 2,000 representatives of major groups and other stakeholders from all regions. There were also 253 side events, 36 exhibits and 17 voluntary national review informal platforms (“labs”).

7. The present summary, submitted pursuant to paragraph 20 of General Assembly resolution [70/299](#), benefitted from the contributions of five rapporteurs: the Permanent Representatives of Argentina, Bangladesh, Romania and the United Republic of Tanzania to the United Nations and the Sustainable Development Goals Coordinator from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. Rapporteurs from Colombia and Liechtenstein shared key messages for the high-level political forum to be held in September, which are reflected in the present summary.

## II. Key messages

8. Discussions among the participants produced the following key messages:

(a) The international community is not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. A deeper, more ambitious, transformative and integrated response is urgently needed;

(b) The 2030 Agenda and the Goals remain the best road map for overcoming the challenges to ending poverty and achieving sustainable development. The international community must move out of its comfort zone to pursue new ways of collective action at a much swifter pace;

(c) Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all is critical for achieving the 2030 Agenda. Platforms for cooperation, new partnerships, more support for teachers and increased investment in universal quality education and lifelong learning are imperative;

(d) Decent work and economic growth are dynamically interlinked with the Goals and are a means for achieving the 2030 Agenda. New technologies such as artificial intelligence, automation and robotics offer new challenges and opportunities in this area. Special efforts are needed to integrate youth, women and vulnerable groups into the labour market;

(e) Inequality between and within countries remains a major obstacle to the achievement of the Goals and inaction in this area risks derailing progress on the 2030 Agenda. Effective policies to reduce inequalities require partnerships and political will;

(f) Progress on combatting climate change and its impacts is falling far short of what is needed. Achieving Goal 13 is still within reach, but the implementation of existing commitments needs to be accelerated and the level of ambition raised substantially;

(g) Peace, justice, and transparent, effective, inclusive and accountable institutions, as well as safe civic spaces, are critical to advancing all of the Goals. This demands responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. Efforts are also needed to improve data in this area;

(h) Substantial gaps remain for financing the Goals. National resource mobilization is needed, including through an enabling environment for private investment, strengthening tax administrations and addressing illicit financial flows. Integrated national financing frameworks can support countries addressing financing challenges. Significant resources can also be mobilized at the regional level;

(i) The Goals must be more systematically incorporated in plans and policies, with a focus on prioritization and the acceleration of progress through interventions that have potential multiplier effects;

(j) Partnerships and international cooperation are fundamental in supporting small island developing States to achieve their sustainable development goals, notably on health and education;

(k) Development strategies in least developed countries and landlocked developing countries must target goals beyond economic growth and encompass aspects related to inclusiveness, equality, universal social services, resilience to climate change and adequate financing;

(l) Investment in data and capacity is needed for adequate measurements to inform policies that ensure no one is left behind;

(m) Strengthening the role of non-State actors is vital to the achievement of the Goals. Meaningful stakeholder engagement should include broad, inclusive consultations and the establishment of formal mechanisms for sustained stakeholder engagement in the implementation of the Goals and in preparations for and discussions of voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum on sustainable development;

(n) Young people should be involved in all their diversity in decision-making, shaping policies from design to implementation, monitoring and review. The 2030 Agenda is the agenda of the young generation and can be achieved through inter-generational partnerships;

(o) Science can guide Governments in shaping policies that address the interactions among the Goals – the co-benefits and the difficult trade-offs – in a way that will spur positive systemic transformations. The *Global Sustainable Development Report* is an important tool to inform policymakers;

(p) Member States welcomed the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the General Assembly, to be held in September 2019, as an opportunity to accelerate action for the Goals. They indicated that an ambitious decade of action will ensure a new trajectory for achievement of the Goals.

### **III. Progress, gaps and obstacles: is the world on track to realize the Goals and leave no one behind?**

9. The main issues addressed included the following:

(a) While progress has been made towards a number of Goals and targets, it has been slow or reversed in others, and the world is not on track to meet the Goals by 2030 or to ensure that no one is left behind;

(b) Overall, there is concern that progress toward the Goals is too slow and that the world is facing setbacks in some areas, such as hunger;

(c) The most vulnerable groups, including women, children, refugees, internally displaced people and persons with disabilities, continue to be at risk of being left behind;

(d) Inequality between and within countries remains a major obstacle to the achievement of the Goals. Further work is needed to gather relevant data that can illuminate the issues around inequalities and begin to identify and address its causes;

(e) Investment in data and capacity is also needed for the adequate measurement of indicators to inform policies, notably for ensuring that no one is left behind. If the most vulnerable are not visible in statistics, there will not be appropriate policy action.

10. The discussions showed that there has been progress on a number of targets, such as extreme poverty and child mortality or certain targets regarding gender equality. At the same time, however, the world is not yet on track for meeting the Goals in 2030. It is even regressing in some areas, such as hunger. Nonetheless, with accelerated and more transformative actions, it can move on to the kind of development track that will allow for transformation of the world and realization of the vision expressed in the 2030 Agenda.

11. High and increasing levels of inequality are a major problem in and of themselves and also pose major obstacles to the achievement of the Goals. Further work is needed to tackle the causes of inequality, such as through combating corruption, strengthening tax collection, ensuring access to justice and respecting human rights. Some participants stated that today's policies give insufficient attention to Goal 10. Some emphasized the importance of addressing inequality between countries and supporting the most vulnerable countries.

12. The importance of improving the capacity of national statistical systems to generate data and measure progress towards the implementing the Goals was identified as a prominent issue, in particular the need to produce disaggregated data to identify exactly who is being left behind and to inform effective action.

13. It was noted that supreme audit institutions have discovered that many countries are still struggling to fully identify costs, set baselines and milestones and collaborate effectively in coordinating their national implementation efforts.

14. Several participants stressed the need to step up efforts to combat climate change. The current emissions trends imply an increased global warming of at least three degrees Celsius by 2100. Measures for more effective adaptation are also urgently required. While many countries have ratified the Paris Agreement and communicated their first nationally determined contributions, only a handful of countries are "walking the talk"; there is need for urgent action, including by setting a meaningful price on carbon.

15. Financing was another prominent issue. Participants identified many gaps related to official development assistance and resource mobilization, including as they related to middle-income countries, and emphasized the need to align national budgets with implementation strategies. Some speakers highlighted multilateralism as being critical to accelerating the implementation of the Goals.

## IV. Review of progress on Goals 4, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17

### Goal 4: Quality education

16. The main issues addressed included the following:

(a) Increasing access to quality education for all is essential to address challenges like climate change, empower people with new skills and opportunities for employment and economic growth, and uphold peaceful societies and effective institutions;

(b) Shortcomings in equality and inclusiveness are among the biggest barriers to achieving Goal 4, in particular for girls and for children in areas of conflict. Countries climbing the development ladder cannot afford to leave even one child behind. In that regard, it is imperative to identify and break down barriers;

(c) In order to secure the quality of education in the future, it is necessary to have platforms for cooperation, new partnerships and shared values around the importance of education, greater support for teachers and increased investment in universal quality education and lifelong learning. Goal 4 requires a revolutionary reimagining of education in the modern world.

17. Education is a central tool for achieving the 2030 Agenda and preparing for the future. Accelerated action in higher education and lifelong learning can enable people to engage in highly skilled jobs and improve their livelihoods, apply new knowledge and innovative thinking to challenges and attain stability and peace.

18. A realignment of education systems is required in order to meet the learning needs of individuals, reflect the modern world while ensuring that traditional knowledge is passed down through generations, tap into learning technologies and digital infrastructures, change mindsets around the value of education for societies and ensure that no one is left behind in terms of access to quality education. Learning must focus on building proficiency in reading and mathematics, and the Goals should be incorporated into education.

19. Educational barriers to girls, youth in rural areas, persons with disabilities, refugees and migrants, and children in areas of conflict must be urgently addressed. Improving the quality of education in rural areas and in lower-income countries requires investments in infrastructure to ensure that children can go to schools equipped with electricity, sanitation and clean water, and to break down digital barriers.

20. Current levels of investment in education and in supporting teachers fall far short of what is needed to achieve Goal 4. Greater public support for education can improve its quality.

### Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth

21. The main issues addressed at the session included the following:

(a) Goal 8 is interlinked with other Goals and serves as a means for achieving the 2030 Agenda, supporting progress towards achieving other Goals;

(b) Although progress has been made, existing inequality gaps are widening, and efforts are urgently needed to include youth, women and other vulnerable groups in the labour market to ensure that no one is left behind;

(c) An enabling environment is necessary to create conditions for the achievement of Goal 8, including for the growth and development of micro-, small

and medium-sized enterprises, for reducing precarious employment and for increasing employment opportunities;

(d) Social protection developed on the basis of social dialogue is a key driver for Goal 8.

22. Goal 8 serves to reaffirm the mutually supportive relationship among economic, social and environmental policies, full employment and decent work. Many speakers recognized the centrality of decent work and the Goal as a means to an end in terms of achieving the 2030 Agenda based on sustained and inclusive economic growth.

23. In order to create a just and sustainable future, the international community must invest in people. This means investing in jobs, skills and social protection and supporting gender equality. It also means investing in the institutions of the labour market so that wages are adequate, working hours are limited, and safety and health as well as other fundamental rights at work are guaranteed. It means adopting policies that promote sustainable economic growth and decent work for all.

24. Many participants called for the implementation of Goal 8 to occur through social dialogue and comprehensive social protection, with economic growth driven by green innovation and resource decoupling. Participants noted the importance of improved governance, the rule of law, inclusive multilateralism and adherence to international human rights and labour standards for achieving the Goal. Multi-stakeholder and inclusive partnerships, public-private and international collaboration were identified as crucial for progress.

25. The informal economy is prevalent in many country settings and needs to be the focus of targeted economic and social policies. An enabling environment for business and good governance contributes not only to job creation but also to the formalization of work and decent work. Gender asymmetry in achieving the Goal 8, including the gender pay gap, still persists in most countries. Youth unemployment remains a primary concern, with a large percentage of young people also not enrolled in school or training programmes.

26. New technologies such as artificial intelligence, automation and robotics offer new challenges and opportunities. They require government policies to ensure that benefits accrue at all levels of society and that non-standard forms of employment respect workers' rights and protections. New technologies can support creativity and entrepreneurship and have the potential to bring about economic productivity gains, but these must be underpinned by the development of digital skills, infrastructure development, technology transfer and other resources in order to avoid a global digital divide, with particular attention paid to countries in special situations.

## **Goal 10: Reduced inequalities**

27. The main issues addressed included the following:

(a) Inequality is strikingly high and becoming worse in parts of the world, and inaction risks derailing progress in other areas of the 2030 Agenda. There are variations in the degree of inequality across countries and regions, but it remains a global problem with implications for the achievement of other Goals;

(b) Legal barriers and discrimination are among the biggest challenges to reducing inequality. Groups including women, migrants, children, people living with hunger and food insecurity, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, ageing populations and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community are at risk of being left behind if barriers to their full and equal participation in society are not removed;

(c) Inequality is about more than income and wealth. Actions must address inequalities in education, health, work, voice, agency (i.e., freedom of choice), housing, infrastructure and exposure to impacts from climate change, among other aspects of leading a dignified life;

(d) Effective policies to reduce inequality require partnerships and common commitments among Governments, the private sector and civil society, and must include the voices of the poor and the excluded. Better data on excluded groups can help inform actions.

28. Inequality is on the rise in many parts of the world and requires urgent and accelerated action to achieve the targets of Goal 10. Inequality goes beyond income and encompasses social and political dimensions, which can drive opportunities and outcomes. Education can be an equalizer and a means to support economic and social mobility, but financial barriers to accessing quality education threaten to reinforce and even increase income inequality.

29. Inequality is not a natural outcome of development. It can be addressed through appropriately designed policies supported by the political will of Governments, the private sector and civil society and by including the voices of those experiencing exclusion. Actions to reduce inequalities include progressive taxation and labour market policies, supporting safe, orderly and regular migration, universal social protection, the provision of public services (notably quality education, health care and childcare), addressing discriminatory laws and practices on any basis including against women, and improving access to justice. Platforms are needed to share information about actions that work to reduce inequalities.

### **Goal 13: Climate action**

30. The main issues addressed included the following:

(a) Progress on Goal 13 is falling far short of what is needed to meet its targets by 2030. If the international community does not change course by 2020, it risks disastrous consequences;

(b) Achieving Goal 13 is still within reach if the implementation of existing commitments is accelerated and ambition levels are raised substantially to limit global warming to 1.5°C through an overarching unity of purpose;

(c) Leveraging synergistic and inclusive approaches across all levels and sectors, engaging the private sector and civil society in partnerships, boosting innovation and new ways of financing, implementing nature-based solutions, supporting education and building capacity are all imperative in order to deliver on the collective commitments under the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda.

31. The world is failing to meet the objectives of the Paris Agreement; that trend will continue unless urgent and unprecedented transitions across all aspects of society are carried out, covering all economic sectors and society as a whole. In its report entitled *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change calls for inclusive, collaborative and synergistic action. The outcome of the twenty-fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Katowice, Poland, from 2 to 14 December 2018, is focused on the need for increased ambition by all nations.

32. It is critical to exploit synergies and co-benefits and take collaborative and coordinated efforts to achieve the Goals and to implement the Paris Agreement. Accelerating the energy transition will be particularly crucial. The synergistic implementation of climate action, sustainable development and disaster risk

reduction, including through nationally determined contributions, national adaptation plans, voluntary national reviews, and national and local disaster risk reduction strategies in the context of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 can ensure advances and progress.

33. Efforts to address the underlying drivers of risk and enhance the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change can help to achieve the targets of the Sendai Framework, which is particularly relevant for small island developing States, least developed countries, and other countries in special situations.

34. The sustainable management of forests can contribute significantly to combating climate change. Successful implementation and scaling-up of forest-based actions can reduce greenhouse gases by an estimated 15 gigatons of equivalent carbon dioxide a year by 2050, potentially closing the current emissions gap.

35. Improving the availability, volume and coverage of and access to international financial resources can support climate action at the scale and speed necessary. Many participants highlighted the importance of replenishing the Green Climate Fund in 2019. Increasing the quantity and quality of financial resources for developing countries, technical and financial support to achieve nationally determined contribution targets and financing for adaptation, particularly for least developed countries, small island developing States and countries affected by conflict is imperative and must focus on the most vulnerable to ensure that no one is left behind.

## **Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions**

36. The main issues addressed at the session included the following:

(a) Goal 16 is both an outcome and an enabler for all the Goals. Peaceful, just and inclusive societies are catalysts for reducing poverty, ensuring quality education and promoting gender equality and economic growth and are also strengthened by the success of such efforts;

(b) Transparent, effective, inclusive and accountable institutions, as well as protected and safe civic spaces, are critical to advancing the implementation of Goal 16 as well as the other Goals. Successful implementation of the Goal requires responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. A people-centred approach by Governments is vital;

(c) Concerted efforts are needed to improve the collection, coverage and quality of data, to develop innovative data collection tools and to include data on women, youth, children and vulnerable groups in the review of Goal 16.

37. Sustainable development cannot be realized without peace, and peace and security would be at risk without sustainable development. There is a clear need to work inclusively to address the drivers and root causes of conflict, which have become multidimensional due to the changing nature of violence.

38. The pace of implementation is uneven and not fast enough for the achievement of the targets of Goal 16 by 2030. Renewed efforts and scaled-up actions to implement the Goal 16 are necessary. There are gaps in terms of coverage and the quality of data available on various targets and there is a need to strengthen statistical capacity and the availability of reliable data. The role of audits in tracking the overall performance of Goal implementation cannot be underestimated.

39. Ensuring participation and inclusiveness in decision-making, through whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches, as well as promoting non-discriminatory laws and policies are essential for the achievement of Goal 16. Governments must pursue integrated approaches, adopt a people-centred approach,



utilize data and build capacity for implementation. Success in this regard requires effective rule of law, improved access to justice and the provision of remedies for victims of injustice.

40. Many participants emphasized the need to scale up investment, institution-building and capacity development for new models of governance based on local needs and ownership and called for enhanced cooperation in addressing corruption and illicit financial and arms flows, as well as for institutional strategies to address new cybercrimes. The role of parliaments in designing institutions and setting up priorities through budgeting was also underscored.

### **Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals**

41. The main issues addressed included the following:

(a) Substantial financing gaps need to be viewed through country and regional lenses. Global aggregate trends can mask the fact that some countries are going off-track with respect to implementing and financing the Goals. A greater focus on country contexts could support more effective and concrete policy actions for the mobilization of national resources, including through creating an enabling environment for private investment, strengthening tax administrations and addressing illicit financial flows;

(b) Integrated national financing frameworks are potential tools to support countries in addressing their financing challenges and serve to identify the availability, nature and applicability of resources within a country. Regional efforts and financing opportunities, as well as international development cooperation, also play important roles and need to be considered;

(c) Multi-stakeholder engagement on financing for development, including with the involvement of civil society, youth and the private sector is essential. The high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the General Assembly and the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development present a turning point for determining how to overcome obstacles to financing the Goals and step up progress through concrete actions and initiatives.

42. Bridging significant financing gaps for the Goals requires building on previous commitments and areas of successful international cooperation, alongside innovations to mobilize the means of implementation. There are unmet opportunities for improving the composition and allocation of financing to maximize the impacts of sustainable development at the national, regional and global levels.

43. Financing approaches should be more closely focused on national contexts, with greater attention paid to the financing particularities of least developed countries, including in Africa. The work of the United Nations on national financing frameworks responds to the broader need to better understand overall financing options.

44. The continued importance of official development assistance was underlined, given that in certain country contexts national Governments have very few options for filling budget gaps. Strengthening national resource mobilization and encouraging long-term investment are also key, and there is considerable scope for improving tax administrations. Illicit financial flows present a challenge.

45. Strategies that could serve to unlock private financing more effectively include policy development to support regulatory environments, greater efforts towards turning development challenges into bankable projects and building capacities. There is scope for multilateral development banks to use existing capital for development purposes, and they could mobilize private financing in areas like infrastructure.

## V. Thematic review

### **What regions are telling the international community about the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Goals**

46. The main issues addressed included the following:

(a) Links among reviews and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda at the national, regional and global levels must be strengthened. Regional forums on sustainable development play a key role in this endeavour by promoting peer reviews, policy exchanges, strengthened collaboration and inclusive engagement;

(b) Voluntary national reviews provide the opportunity for Member States to enhance and accelerate their integrated approaches, including through mainstreaming implementation of the Goals into national development plans, budgets and planning processes;

(c) The world is facing common challenges spawned by, for example, increasing inequalities, climate change and displacements. Across the five regions, progress is slow, and transboundary work is necessary to accelerate progress with regard to the Goals, making coherent and integrated policymaking more imperative than ever.

47. All regions referred to the inclusion of the marginalized and the furthest left behind in the context of Goal implementation. They emphasized gender equality and women's empowerment and highlighted the rising inequalities and the negative effects of climate change afflicting all regions. They also underscored the significant role of effective institutions and policy coordination in tackling the challenges and in aligning national development plans with the 2030 Agenda.

48. In addition to region-specific attributes and common challenges, many participants underlined the enabling role of technology and quality disaggregated data while urging that due attention needed to be paid to externalities, particularly in labour markets. Several also referred to the need for disaggregated data to tackle vulnerabilities and the need to strengthen national statistical systems. Some referred to the importance of multilateralism in fighting inequalities and promoting peace. Others stressed the critical role of trade, whole-of-society and multi-stakeholder approaches and underlined the pernicious effects of corruption and illicit financial flows, calling for an enhanced focus on transparency and accountability in addition to effective institutions.

### **Perspectives of small island developing States**

49. The main issues addressed included the following:

(a) Small island developing States are investing heavily in education and human development to provide an enabling environment for equipping citizens in the twenty-first century with relevant competencies and skills to drive entrepreneurship, economic growth and sustainable development;

(b) Small island developing States need low-cost concessional financing that is easily and quickly accessed to support sustainable development. Most of these States have limited fiscal space owing to the fact that debt servicing and rebuilding after disasters diverts resources from social investments;

(c) Partnerships and international cooperation are fundamental to helping small island developing States to achieve their sustainable development objectives.

50. Small island developing States are pursuing policies and strategies at the regional and national levels that are designed to reduce vulnerabilities and strengthen resilience. They have developed, or are in the process of developing, comprehensive frameworks for sustainable development that reflect the 2030 Agenda and Samoa Pathway and their mutually reinforcing synergies.

51. Access to education has improved in some countries and is highly prioritized in terms of ensuring greater inclusivity and sustainability. Despite efforts and the progress made, small island developing States to face serious challenges, with increasing vulnerabilities and rising inequalities. Youth unemployment continues to be of concern, as does the range of health issues affecting these countries.

52. Investments are inadequate in such critical areas as education, data and statistics, the provision of social safety nets, opportunities for regular income through decent work and the development of skills and competencies. Digital technologies can play an important role in accelerating social development and should be factored into national policies.

53. For most small island developing States, fiscal challenges have limited the capacity of their Governments to deliver social services. For many, debt servicing has diverted resources from social and capital investment. The development constraints faced by most of these States in terms of the availability of financial resources at the national level mean that the full and tangible support of bilateral partners and the international community is paramount. To meet the technical and financial requirements for implementing a new generation of integrated development frameworks, the critical role of development and private finance, partnership, entrepreneurship and cooperation cannot be overstated.

54. Small island developing States must build resilience in a rapidly evolving global environment, boost their absorptive capacity, adapt to climate change, develop strong social and economic systems, and mobilize financing to implement and monitor results. They must also strengthen well-established relationships with traditional partners and nurture new ones in the context of South-South and triangular cooperation and smart partnerships.

55. Small island developing States also need global policy implementation strategies and reporting processes that are more streamlined and coherent and that are better tailored to their limited capacities, taking into account existing national and regional reporting mechanisms and processes.

### **Perspectives of least developed countries and landlocked developing countries**

56. The main issues addressed included the following:

(a) Least developed countries and landlocked developing countries continue to face structural challenges to sustainable development. While there has been some progress, these countries are not yet on track to meet the Goals by 2030;

(b) Much more is needed from Governments and the international community, and the private sector and civil society must be further engaged. Security challenges, disasters and climate change divert already scarce resources from development, which must be considered in development and international assistance plans;

(c) Countries in the process of graduating from the least developed country category need support to ensure a smooth transition. Landlocked developing countries also need substantial support, in particular with capacity-building, to overcome constraints to their development;

(d) Development strategies in least developed countries and landlocked developing countries must seek solutions beyond economic growth and prioritize inclusiveness, equality, universal social services, resilience towards climate change and adequate financing. Inclusive development requires adequate financing and policy choices.

57. The discussion revolved around the special needs and vulnerabilities of least developed countries and landlocked developing countries, including those related to geographical and structural challenges. While there has been some progress, development has been insufficient and these countries are not on track to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030. Several participants highlighted the need to “reach the furthest behind first”.

58. Participants referred to the greater vulnerability of least developed countries and landlocked developing countries to climate change, disasters and security challenges, all of which divert resources away from development and cause significant setbacks to sustainability. Some participants stressed the importance of multilateralism and of a set of international rules and institutions that support the rights and interests of vulnerable countries. Specific reference was made to the need for an intergovernmental tax commission.

59. Ahead of the midterm review in November 2019 of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024, participants referred to the priority areas and synergies of the Programme with the 2030 Agenda and called for greater support for implementation of the Programme. Participants also attached great importance to the Fifth United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries in 2021, which was mandated by the General Assembly in its resolution [73/242](#) and will provide an opportunity to accelerate progress by those countries towards achieving the Goals and the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020.

60. Numerous participants proposed ways in which the international community could assist landlocked developing countries in overcoming constraints to their development through means of implementation, such as financial resources, capacity-building, regional integration, support provided for building resilience and responding to the impacts of climate change, and the inclusion of women and girls in all strategies related to the implementation of the Goals. Participants also called for greater support from transit countries as well as support to transit countries for implementing relevant agreements and conventions in support of landlocked developing countries.

## **Perspectives of society**

61. The main issues addressed included the following:

(a) Given the cross-cutting importance of human rights in the 2030 Agenda, the high-level political forum should enhance this perspective with the inclusion of groups, especially those most marginalized;

(b) Regional forums present unique opportunities for strengthening accountability and exchanging good practices to realize the Goals and leave no one behind. Efforts should be made to enhance links between regional forums and the high-level political forum by integrating regional perspectives in the forum and replicating actions to implement the Goals at the regional level and review best practices at the global level;

(c) The participation of all stakeholders is vital and should be strengthened during the 2030 Agenda review processes, including reform of the high-level political forum;

(d) Strengthening the role of major groups and other stakeholders at the national, regional and global levels is essential to the achievement of the Goals. Meaningful stakeholder engagement should entail inclusive consultations targeting the most marginalized in the development of national priorities and plans and the establishment of formal mechanisms for sustained engagement.

62. Many participants stressed the importance of ensuring that the follow-up and review process for the 2030 Agenda would be inclusive and equitable. Human rights are an intrinsic part of sustainable development, and sustainable development is a powerful vehicle for the realization of all human rights.

63. Participants emphasized that stakeholders play a crucial role in strengthening the follow-up and review process of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Major groups and other stakeholders reiterated the importance of their role and the need to actively promote the increased involvement of all relevant actors towards an effective implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda.

64. Many participants underlined the need to expand space for stakeholder participation and engagement during the forum. They asked to include, from the outset at the national level, grass-roots consultations at all stages of the voluntary national review process, including in the follow-up actions after the presentation of the national reviews at the forum. The voluntary national review process should be accessible to everyone from the preparation stage, with timelines for the reviews shared with diverse stakeholders, in particular those at risk of being left behind. The creation of regional civil society hubs can enhance the participation of all stakeholders, both at regional forums and at the global level.

### **Science policy interface, including the briefing by the independent group of scientists on the *Global Sustainable Development Report***

65. The main issues addressed included the following:

(a) It is time to sound the alarm and accelerate action if the international community is to achieve the 2030 Agenda;

(b) Science can guide Governments in shaping policy that addresses the interactions among Goals – both co-benefits and difficult trade-offs – in a way that will spur the systemic transformations the world needs;

(c) Governments, academia, the private sector, civil society and others must come together to invest in science for sustainable development – mission-driven, innovative approaches to science that complement traditional research. Science for sustainable development, or sustainability science, will be transdisciplinary, incorporating indigenous, local and lay knowledge;

(d) The international community should commit to building new capacity and to making better use of existing science, technology and innovation capacity in the global South. Achieving the 2030 Agenda requires country-specific solutions and approaches.

66. The Co-Chairs of the groups of scientists who prepared the *Global Sustainable Development Report* shared the key findings contained in the report, namely: the world is off-track in many areas of Goal implementation, with negative trends in

inequality, climate change, and loss of biodiversity, and inadequate progress in many others, including poverty eradication and defeating hunger.

67. The report contains four proposed levers for action: governance; economy and finance; individual and collective behaviour; and science and technology. The levers should be deployed in an integrated manner in six entry points: human well-being, sustainable and just economies, food, energy, cities and the global commons. A commitment to sustainability science and building capacity in the global South will be critical for progress.

68. Policymakers should invest in mechanisms such as science academies that can synthesize existing knowledge, make it accessible to policymakers at all levels and reach across disciplinary divides to generate innovative solutions.

69. Science can highlight synergies between various United Nations processes, including in the area of disaster risk reduction, and can make implementation more effective. Science, technology and data can play a decisive role in local policies and can improve the lives of everyday people.

70. Participants welcomed the findings contained in the *Global Sustainable Development Report*. Several expressed a commitment to its recommendations, particularly in supporting the scientific capacity in the global South, by training teachers and investing in centres of excellence and other institutions that discourage brain drain. Participants also supported recommendations on encouraging the private sector and funding partners to invest in science for sustainable development.

71. Science and technology – and the process for preparing the report – should leave no one behind and should ensure that the needs and perspectives of women, persons with disabilities and others in vulnerable situations are fully integrated into all sustainable development actions.

72. The Co-Chairs indicated that commitments made during the high-level political forum under the auspices of the Council in July 2019 would be reflected in the final version of the report to be launched at the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the General Assembly in September 2019.

### **Report of the fourth multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals**

73. The main issues addressed included the following:

(a) The establishment in 2015 of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism affirmed the essential role of science, technology and innovation for the achievement of the Goals;

(b) The multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation has attracted interest from young innovators, academics, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private sector communities;

(c) The crucial role that technological transitions can play in achieving the Goals requires greater attention;

(d) New technologies are evolving rapidly and present both an opportunity and a challenge;

(e) Action is needed to strengthen international cooperation and knowledge-sharing between developed and developing countries and increase investments in science, technology and innovation, in particular in developing countries.

74. Despite limited resources, significant progress has been made towards the full operationalization of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism.

75. The multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation has catalysed and built on cooperation with related, regular conferences and other forums such as the global solutions summit and the Global Sustainable Technology and Innovation Conference. The United Nations inter-agency task team on science, technology and innovation now comprises 42 United Nations entities that work closely with the 10-member group and representatives of the academic, business and NGO communities.

76. Many targets of the Goals reflect the need for a circular economy and cannot be achieved without changes in production and consumption processes or through transformative technological innovations. Many of these technological innovations exist today, such as deep geothermal energy and the use of carbon as a resource, but they need to be applied at scale and adapted at the regional level.

77. The multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation highlighted the need for better understanding of and insights into the impacts of rapid technological change and how it might unfold in the coming years. Participants highlighted the work of the inter-agency task team to develop road maps on the use of science, technology and innovation as being extremely useful. The Technology Facilitation Mechanism should consider how to implement the recommendations of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation launched by the Secretary-General.

78. Skills in science, technology, engineering and math are key for achieving the Goals. In engineering, there is a significant shortfall in both developed and developing countries, with continued low participation by women. Inclusive practices must be established to ensure that women acquire such skills and that they are not left behind.

79. Many participants emphasized the challenges and risks brought about by science, technology and innovation since the use of new materials can have implications. Technologies like artificial intelligence and robotics can disrupt employment, with significant social and economic impacts. In addition, science, technology and innovation may have disparate and unequal impacts on countries and on men and women. The use of science, technology and innovation should be at scale nationally and be supported by international systems. Reducing inequalities among countries includes focusing on strengthening local innovation systems and addressing the link between innovation and inequality.

## **VI. Voluntary national reviews**

### **Four years of voluntary national reviews: what has been learned in implementing the Goals?**

80. The main issues addressed included the following:

(a) A whole-of-society approach is critical for implementing the Goals. Multi-stakeholder involvement will lead to more effective implementation. Governments should ensure that stakeholder engagement concerning implementation of the 2030 Agenda is inclusive, timely, transparent and institutionalized;

(b) Countries should do more to ensure that no one is left behind. The root causes of inequality must be addressed. Enhanced efforts with new, dynamic strategies should be in place across all sectors to reach those furthest behind;

(c) The voluntary national reviews should not be seen as an end point. Continuous and inclusive follow-up and review of implementation ought to take place, as a matter of course, at the national level, including during years that countries are not presenting the reviews at the high-level political forum.

81. Many of the countries that had presented voluntary national reviews since 2016 outlined progress had made towards achieving the Goals, including poverty alleviation programmes, climate action plans and strategies for a low-carbon circular economy. They noted changes and periodic reviews of their national sustainable development strategies, awareness-raising activities on the Goals and efforts to take complementary and simultaneous action in the social, economic and environmental fields.

82. Most of the participants agreed that the 2030 Agenda provides a strong impetus for policy coherence, integration, coordination and the harmonization of different work streams within the Government and beyond. Inclusive institutional frameworks, including at the highest levels of government, address the interrelated nature of the Goals and involve all agencies in cross-cutting efforts. The transformative nature of the process arose not only from the Goals but also from factors such as intergenerational equity, the commitment to multi-stakeholder involvement and the human rights perspective of the 2030 Agenda.

83. Challenges include low levels of stakeholder awareness and engagement with the Goals; lack of available data, particularly disaggregated data; diverse and parallel international reporting systems; the limited capacity of Governments to prepare voluntary national reviews requiring the use of consultants, leading to weak ownership; lack of monitoring and accountability frameworks; and political shifts within Governments.

84. Overall, the 2030 Agenda provides a universal agenda common to all countries and, despite the challenges mentioned above, has strengthened political will, generated opportunities to increase cooperation between Governments and other stakeholders, raised political and public awareness and created national ownership of the Goals. The voluntary national review process has fostered peer-learning, helped to establish inclusive institutions and legal frameworks and created systems of integrated delivery to accelerate progress towards achieving the Goals. It is important that the reviews lead to follow-up actions at the country level.

### **Summary of voluntary national reviews presented at the high-level political forum under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council**

85. The main issues addressed included the following:

(a) Many countries have mainstreamed the 2030 Agenda and integrated the Goals into national development strategies, policies, plans and other relevant frameworks;

(b) Establishment of high-level multisectoral coordination structures to lead and monitor implementation of the Goals can ensure that the Goals are mainstreamed and prioritized across different government ministries;

(c) Some countries have implemented policies and programmes for human rights, access to justice, legal reform, and improving governance;

(d) The impacts of conflict, humanitarian crises and climate change prevent the achievement of the Goals, notably in the areas of health, education and nutrition;



(e) Mobilizing resources for climate change adaptation is a critical pillar of development finance;

(f) More efforts are required to enhance adaptation and mitigation measures by countries and the transition of countries to renewable energy;

(g) Working groups on statistics and data can improve monitoring of Goal-related indicators and create a comprehensive analytical framework that incorporates social, cultural and environmental measures;

(h) Countries have advanced a wide range of measures to strengthen the engagement of all stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda, which is key to achieving inclusive and sustainable development and ensuring that no one is left behind;

(i) Partnerships at local, national, regional and global levels, including with the private sector, are essential for implementing the Goals;

(j) Multilateralism and international collaboration are also needed to achieve the Goals;

(k) Young people must be given a voice in the implementation, follow-up and review of the Goals.

86. During the ministerial segment, 47 countries presented voluntary national reviews: Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, Congo, Côte d' Ivoire, Croatia, Eswatini, Fiji, Ghana, Guatemala, Guyana, Iceland, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mongolia, Nauru, New Zealand, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Philippines, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Serbia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania and Vanuatu. In 2019, Azerbaijan, Chile, Guatemala, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sierra Leone and Turkey presented their reviews for the second time.

87. Many countries have been actively pursuing the implementation of the Goals through various policies, plans and institutional arrangements. Whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches must be anchored within national sustainable development strategies. Strengthening coordination across government ministries are critical to ensure integrated policymaking. Countries reported on institutional arrangements in place for coordination and implementation of the Goals.

88. Some countries have established multisectoral working groups with reporting frameworks for each ministry or interdepartmental collaboration across a variety of ministries and government agencies. Others work through multi-stakeholder advisory arrangements.

89. Different approaches exist to prioritize, monitor and evaluate the Goals, including adapted national indicators, the creation of statistical portals and complementary reporting. Country priorities often differ depending on their level of development.

90. Presentations also focused on localizing the Goals through collaboration and partnerships among towns, local municipalities, the business community and civil society organizations; the role of parliaments; the importance of regional cooperation; and the need to enhance capacity of subnational structures.

91. Countries discussed both the importance and challenge of strengthening national statistical capacities and the need for quality data collection, management, and analysis to thoroughly assess and monitor of Goal implementation, as well as to ensure adequate baseline data and the harmonization of data sources. Lack of

disaggregated data remains a challenge for many countries, which stressed the importance of increasing capacity for data collection, filling data gaps, encouraging the use of data, cooperating to collect administrative data at all levels and strengthening the data ecosystem. Countries also emphasized the importance of increasing the use of satellite data, anonymized call records and citizen-generated data.

92. They also highlighted a number of policy priorities to ensure inclusion, ownership and accountability of all relevant groups in Goal implementation. Participatory and inclusive processes based on consultations with stakeholders are being undertaken not only in the planning and implementation of the Goals but also in the preparation of the voluntary national reviews. Countries are working with diverse groups of stakeholders in the implementation of the Goals by including them in established coordination mechanisms to ensure that no one is left behind. Engagement with the private sector was also indicated as being important in generating awareness of sustainable development and in breaking down silos.

93. Countries underscored their efforts to promote economic growth and decent work for all. Some noted the high rate of unemployment among youth and women as a challenge and stressed the role of youth in enhancing inclusive and sustainable development. Several initiatives focused on reducing inequalities, especially for the most vulnerable sectors of the population, extending the scope of social safety nets, progressively raising the guaranteed minimum wage and improving the condition of workers. There was broad agreement that quality education is a key factor for achieving all the Goals.

94. Many countries considered climate change as the biggest challenge to the Goals and one of the major sources of vulnerability. Policy and institutional frameworks at the national level have been established to address climate change and build resilience, and climate change is being mainstreamed into many national development plans. Achieving the Paris Agreement will require not only technological progress but also significant changes in consumption.

95. A range of initiatives focused on reducing inequalities, particularly for countries lagging behind and for vulnerable populations. Several countries announced progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment through gender-responsive budgeting, legal aid programmes for victims of domestic and gender-based violence, strengthened participation in parliaments, and legislation to ensure equal pay.

96. Financing the implementation of the Goals remains an obstacle for many countries. Financing strategies were presented, including budget planning, mobilizing income sources and internal revenues, fighting corruption, tackling smuggling and tax evasion, establishing a financing hub for public-private partnerships, and blended finance. Investments in infrastructure, including transportation, the development of road networks, electricity generation, better connectivity to improve trade and investment, and clean energy development have been instrumental in supporting progress towards the achievement of the Goals, especially for landlocked developing countries.

97. The role of innovation and research for sustainable development was stressed, with some highlighting the need for progress in scientific and technological cooperation, targeted technology transfers, and capacity-building in the scientific and technological sector.

98. Efforts towards achieving the Goals need continued engagement and investment and must be aligned with other United Nations frameworks such as the Paris Agreement, the Samoa Pathway and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development.

## VII. Lessons learned from the first cycle of the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council

99. The main issues addressed included the following:

(a) Linkages of the 2030 Agenda to other international agendas and the interlinkages across the Goals should be more deeply explored through the high-level political forum;

(b) Innovation, experimentation and the advances of subnational actors should enable and encourage more ambitious national action;

(c) Regional dialogues and strengthened regional capacity are critical for learning within the region and for contributing to the forum;

(d) Proposed improvement of the forum's workflow included splitting the forum into two separate sessions, with the first session focusing on the thematic review and analysis that would inform the second ministerial-level session at a later date.

100. The forum has delivered effectively so far and is considered to be significant and useful for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. It is a success in terms of the high rate of attendance it has attracted, the attention that has been paid to it and the in-depth reviews it facilitates of the Goals. Analyses from the voluntary national reviews were taken into account, and the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Special edition: progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals" (E/2019/68) and the *Global Sustainable Development Report* were widely consulted.

101. The forum successfully builds on the outcomes of regional sustainable development forums, and the cycle of the Council, including the Forum on Financing for Development and multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation. It benefits from inputs from intergovernmental bodies and extensive contributions from stakeholders. By adopting a system of collective reporting and review, it provides a holistic approach that includes all actors fundamental to policy implementation. At the same time, ways should be found to build on the multiple inputs to the high-level political forum.

102. The high-level political forum engages meaningfully with stakeholders. It brings together participants working in all three dimensions of sustainable development for discussions based on evidence, data and analysis. The voluntary national review process triggers the review, and often the improvement, of institutional coordination for Goal implementation and helps engage different sectors and constituencies. The reviews are useful for sharing experiences and lessons learned, overcoming, implementation challenges, advancing national implementation and mobilizing partnerships.

103. At the same time, improvements are needed. The high-level political forum could offer more strategic political guidance on sustainable development, including in the ministerial declaration, to ensure follow-up and action-based outcomes, focus on interlinkages among the Goals and strengthen the science-policy interface. Some participants stated that focusing on a few Goals every year has led to a continued silo approach; others felt that the forum should continue to review a set of Goals every year, along with the theme. Important areas for strengthening include providing high-level political guidance for accelerated action; systematic reporting on all Goals; evidence-based analysis in voluntary national reviews; better identification of challenges and areas where assistance is required in the reviews; and better ways to exchange experiences.

104. Countries could be more systematically encouraged to report on all 17 Goals, rather than on the Goals under review in a particular year. There could be more time to evaluate the overall outcome of the voluntary national reviews to identify good practices and emerging trends in Goal implementation and more time could be allotted for presentations of the reviews at the forum. Participants also recommended presentation of the reviews at the regional forums, improved contributions by stakeholders and reviews by other entities.

105. The high-level political forum on sustainable development, as a “marketplace of ideas” could more effectively transmit key outcome messages to improve dialogue at the national, regional and global levels. It should include a greater number of stakeholders, more space for interaction, more cross-cutting issues and a stronger secretariat. It should also do more to strengthen the analysis of linkages among the Goals, focus on regional implementation of the Goals, improve engagement with civil society – especially youth – and become more accessible to people with disabilities.

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