



Chief Executives Board for Coordination

Distr.: General
4 September 2020

Original: English

First regular session of 2020
New York (online), 14 May 2020

Summary of deliberations

I. Introduction

1. The first regular session of 2020 of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) was held on 14 May 2020. Owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the session could not be held in person in Nairobi, as originally planned. It was instead held entirely as a videoconference and scaled down from one and a half days to five hours, with the Secretary-General chairing from New York.
2. The session consisted of three segments, on the following themes: (a) the state of the world; (b) financing and data for the Sustainable Development Goals in the COVID-19 context; and (c) nature: the impact of coronavirus disease on the “super year” 2020 and beyond.
3. In the present summary, the highlights of the session’s deliberations are provided.

II. Segment 1 – state of the world

4. The Secretary-General presented an overview of the current state of the world, reflecting on the positioning of the multilateral system in the immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, as well as on the risks brought by the current crisis with regard to human rights, global governance and international cooperation. The Secretary-General noted that the virus had demonstrated the fragility of humankind and the planet, and he called for more humility, unity and solidarity in the world to deal with the crisis as a global community.
5. With that in mind, the Secretary-General brought to the Board’s attention the United Nations policy briefs on the impact of COVID-19, released in April and May 2020, showcasing the fundamental role of the United Nations system as a global platform. He acknowledged the very strong spirit of family demonstrated by United Nations system entities in the response to COVID-19, which was echoed by CEB members. However, he encouraged the system to continue to network strongly across the pillars of the United Nations, as well as to engage with more actors, to achieve an inclusive multilateralism.



6. In the ensuing discussion, the Board considered global economic trends, including in international trade, and warned of negative global economic repercussions of COVID-19, in particular a high risk of an increase in poverty and inequality. Principals also acknowledged a number of human rights challenges and recognized that deep-rooted and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequalities were magnified by the pandemic. While discussing various economic, social and environmental risks associated with the crisis, members also reflected on opportunities to build back better.

7. Recognizing the necessity of a human-centred recovery, CEB united behind the Call to Action on Human Rights of the Secretary-General, emphasizing that responses that respected and were shaped by human rights resulted in better outcomes with regard to defeating the pandemic and building back better.

III. Segment 2 – financing and data for the Sustainable Development Goals in the coronavirus disease context

8. Opening the second segment, the Secretary-General stressed the importance of financing and data in leading the world towards sustainable and resilient pathways that would enable the global community to defeat COVID-19, recover better and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Pointing to the need for timely, disaggregated and high-quality data for effective evidence-based policymaking and decision-making, as well as the amplified importance of leveraging public and private financial resources to support struggling economies and vulnerable populations, the Secretary-General emphasized the role of the United Nations system in supporting Member States in their recovery efforts.

9. Recognizing the complexity of the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for financing and the achievement of the Goals, the Special Envoy on Financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Mahmoud Mohieldin, in his function as moderator, noted that, while new funding had been made available in response to the pandemic, the challenge of adequate funding and resources for the 2030 Agenda was exacerbated by the impact of negative global economic trends and the risk of funds being diverted to continuously emerging, unforeseen COVID-19-related requirements. Emphasizing the importance of effective national, regional and global policy coordination and partnerships, the Special Envoy stressed the need to link current short-term responses to the pandemic with medium- and long-term measures to achieve a sustainable recovery within the context of the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals. He highlighted the need for strengthened data systems to underpin the monitoring of activities and ensure accountability.

10. To frame the discussion, the Deputy Secretary-General outlined current challenges and opportunities resulting from the pandemic. She recognized the tremendous health, humanitarian and development efforts by the United Nations system in response to the pandemic and in support of Member States to address its macro and socioeconomic consequences. The Deputy Secretary-General called for a global response in solidarity with everyone, everywhere, in particular in developing countries, because many gaps remained, current responses were insufficient and advances in achieving the 2030 Agenda were endangered. The Deputy Secretary-General stressed the need to keep an unwavering focus on the implementation of all of the Goals while offering the United Nations framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19 as a foundation for a greener and more sustainable recovery, putting people at the centre of all efforts.

11. CEB members benefited from introductory presentations on the main new financing modalities that had emerged in response to the global pandemic, and they

considered how all financing components could be leveraged for an effective and green economic recovery post-COVID-19 and throughout the decade of action to deliver the Goals by 2030.

12. The Director-General of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, provided an overview of the current status of the Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan, the COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund and the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, stressing the need for increased efforts and resources to address the health effects of the pandemic. Pointing out major disruptions to essential health and humanitarian services and severe economic impacts already seen at the country level, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, informed the Board of the status of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 within the framework of the United Nations coordinated appeal. The Board received an overview of the COVID-19 response and recovery multi-partner trust fund, which was intended to support the implementation of the framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to the disease, by the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Reforms and designate for managing the trust fund, Jens Wandel.

13. It was stressed that the funding mechanisms needed to be linked with the United Nations framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19 to support Member States in identifying the most vulnerable populations, determining ways to leverage investment and ensuring that the response to the crisis was a driver for recovery. To that end, members were reminded that it was of particular importance for the United Nations country teams and resident coordinators to support Member States in designing national financing policies to leverage public and private funding and investment for both the recovery from the pandemic and the 2030 Agenda.

14. Acknowledging the tangible risk of stagnation or regression in relation to progress made towards achieving the Goals, members highlighted a number of priorities, including the need to strengthen the purchasing power of people to address the threat of hunger, the importance of scaling up social protection systems and the demand to invest in physical and digital infrastructure and strong institutions. Some Board members suggested the need to restructure the public debt of some Member States, in particular of developing countries, including debt held by commercial creditors, and underscored the vital role of international financial institutions in supporting vulnerable and indebted countries. Members noted the need to consider the situations of fragile countries and prevent the further exacerbation of conflict owing to the pandemic and its impacts. In that regard, the relevance of the Peacebuilding Fund was highlighted.

15. CEB members also benefited from an overview of ongoing system-wide initiatives on the strengthened and innovative use of data and statistics. The *Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere: with Insight, Impact and Integrity* as an overarching reference for data-driven leadership was introduced, and the Board recognized the vital importance of data as an asset for the United Nations system and as a global public good. It was stressed that the protection of personal data, privacy issues and the strengthened coherence of existing data privacy rules within the United Nations system were of vital importance, taking into account the diversity of United Nations system entity mandates.

16. The Board endorsed and commended the System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics, developed by the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System through the High-level Committee on Programmes, which was introduced to CEB by the Director-General of the International Labour Organization, Guy Ryder, in his capacity as Chair of the High-level Committee on Programmes. Members recognized the road map as an

ambitious collective effort by the United Nations system's chief statisticians to innovate United Nations data and statistical outputs in support of Member States and the international community.

17. The Executive Director of the United Nations Office for Project Services, Grete Faremo, in her capacity as Chair of the High-level Committee on Management, introduced the United Nations data cube, a system-wide framework of data standards for reporting on financial flows, as a key response to stay on track to deliver the Goals, demonstrate impact and enhance transparency and accountability. The United Nations system had a road map in place to achieve compliance with the data standards by the end of 2021.

18. Outlining several challenges in relation to data and statistics, CEB members emphasized the need to make United Nations system data more interactive and available in real time; obtain access to new data sources, including big data; and explore the application of artificial intelligence. Members stressed the importance of investing in information technology, shared databases and capacity-building within the United Nations system and at the country level to pool efforts to collect data and close existing data gaps. In that spirit, CEB members welcomed the report entitled "How COVID-19 is changing the world: a statistical perspective",¹ published by the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, as an excellent example of the international statistical community's contribution to a significant global challenge.

19. In closing, the Secretary-General recognized the effort by the United Nations system to advance the vital initiatives brought before CEB in support of the 2030 Agenda and ongoing COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, in particular in the light of the impact of the pandemic on United Nations system entities. He called upon all CEB members and their organizations to move ahead immediately with the implementation of those initiatives.

Conclusion

20. The Board endorsed the System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics (CEB/2020/1/Add.1), supporting the ambition to innovate United Nations data and statistical outputs and stressing the need for its speedy implementation.

IV. Segment 3 – nature: the impact of coronavirus disease on the “super year” 2020 and beyond

21. During the third segment, CEB considered the importance of reversing the current trajectory of biodiversity loss, the degradation of nature and climate change. The Secretary-General, in his opening remarks, underlined that never in history had humankind been at total war with nature, and it was time to make peace. The COVID-19 pandemic had dramatically demonstrated the repercussions of the loss of nature. He stressed that nature, biodiversity and climate change remained absolute priorities for the United Nations. That meant influencing actions that produced results, such as promoting nature-based solutions, while addressing climate change and threats to biodiversity seriously.

22. The moderator and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Inger Andersen, noted that humans were part of nature and had harmed it at their own expense. The pandemic was only a signal of the hefty bill that the

¹ Available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/documents/covid19-report-ccsa.pdf>.

international community had yet to receive. It was time to listen to scientific evidence (which underscored that protecting nature underpinned the Goals), economists (who emphasized that nature- and climate-positive policies offered superior economic characteristics), business leaders (who recognized that environmental risks were among the chief ones that the world would be facing) and the increasingly loud voices of public opinion. It was essential to recalibrate and “flip the switch to green” in the recovery from the pandemic. Now was the time to intensify the strides that had been made towards integrating nature into planning and programming and use the unique opportunity to lift the nature agenda in support of sustainable development and the decade of action.

23. The Special Envoy on Climate Action and Finance, Mark Carney, emphasized the responsibility of the global system to shift to net zero by 2050 and that the pandemic had illustrated that investing early was a modest cost, compared with the cost associated with acting later. He noted that every sector in virtually every economy would be restructured as a result of the pandemic, that companies and countries would need to change their strategies because the underlying fundamental parameters had changed and that, in every decision made by financial institutions, climate would need to be taken into account. The COVID-19 pandemic provided an enormous opportunity to focus on net zero commitments and action. The Special Envoy highlighted the role of the United Nations system in ensuring the existence of tools and information to support companies and countries in taking such measures.

24. The Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Climate Action and Assistant Secretary-General of the Climate Action Team, Selwin Hart, spoke of the need to design the economic recovery to achieve the goal of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2030 by embedding green policies and incentives and attaching climate-positive conditions to bailout funds to ensure that environmental protection would not be rolled back in the name of economic recovery. He noted the climate actions that the Secretary-General had outlined for the recovery from the pandemic and the need to include the multi-stakeholder coalitions launched at the 2019 Climate Action Summit. The pandemic provided a historic opportunity for the United Nations system to support Member States, in particular smaller countries, in changing their emissions trajectories, as well as to connect nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and nature-based solutions with building back better.

25. In the ensuing discussion, CEB members underscored the close connections among people, nature and climate, recognizing that scientists were warning that future pandemics would be on the horizon if humankind did not end its rapid destruction of nature. Board members noted the role of the agricultural sector as a nature-positive force, as well as the need for nature-, ecosystem- and science-based solutions as a central part of building back better and ensuring food security. Those issues were part of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, to be addressed in 2021, at the world food systems summit. Board members recognized the role of science in policymaking and decision-making, highlighting the role of the United Nations system in promoting international scientific cooperation and open science, including data and research, as a global public good. The power of scientific diplomacy and the need for science education, in particular for girls, were underscored.

26. CEB members noted the importance of taking nature into account in development indices; nature provided free, yet essential, ecosystem services that were not taken into account in those indices. To that end, in the *Human Development Report 2020* of the United Nations Development Programme, an attempt would be made to review the human development indices and connect them with nature. Furthermore, it was essential to link building back better with nationally determined contributions because they included ready-made vehicles for major green investment opportunities, for example in land restoration, carbon sequestration, renewable energy, sustainable

buildings and transportation. Similarly, greening stimulus recovery packages to arrive at a low-carbon development trajectory was underscored. Board members agreed that a true recovery involved integrating all aspects of sustainability and linking climate change, biodiversity and nature.

27. The Board saw a need for stronger mobilization regarding nature across the entire United Nations system, as well as for greater understanding of the organizations' footprints in relation to nature and actions that could be taken to regulate those footprints. Nature, which was the essence of the Goals, was indivisible from the rest of the United Nations agenda, including climate change action.

28. The Secretary-General, in his closing remarks, noted that "opportunity" had been the word pronounced the most in the discussion. Reconciling with nature, and making the necessary transformational changes, would be a battle requiring much hard work, advocacy and commitment across the United Nations system.

Conclusion

29. CEB tasked the High-level Committee on Programmes with developing a common approach to integrating biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development into United Nations policy and programme planning and delivery.

V. Other matters

A. Tribute to Board members

30. The Secretary-General paid tribute to the Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organization, Francis Gurry, and to the Director General of the World Trade Organization, Roberto Azevêdo, who were attending a CEB session for the last time in their current roles.

B. Endorsement of documents

31. The following documents were endorsed electronically after the conclusion of the CEB session:

(a) Report of the High-level Committee on Management at its thirty-ninth session ([CEB/2020/3](#));

(b) Report of the High-level Committee on Programmes at its thirty-ninth session ([CEB/2020/4](#)).

C. Date and venue of the forthcoming session

32. Board members were reminded of the confirmed dates of the CEB second regular session of 2020, 4 and 5 November 2020, to be held in New York.
