



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
1 May 2024

Original: English

2024 session

27 July 2023–25 July 2024

Agenda item 5

High-level segment on reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions

Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

A confluence of catastrophic events has put the world in perpetual crisis mode. Multiple overlapping crises have materially affected the development prospects of developing countries, including causing significant setbacks in their efforts to eradicate poverty and end hunger. Crises have negatively impacted global progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by raising the number of people pushed into poverty, weakening food security, increasing inequality, widening gender gaps, causing significant health consequences and leading to high educational losses. Vulnerable groups such as women and children have been particularly affected by the impact of crises.

At the same time, the experience from these crises shows that Sustainable Development Goal investment serves as a cost-effective resilience-building strategy because it addresses the economic, social and environmental challenges simultaneously. The recent coronavirus disease (COVID-19) experience has shown that countries that had made more progress in achieving the Goals were in a better position to deal with the impact of the pandemic.

Building on the recommendations of the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023, and to forge enhanced synergy in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Secretary-General proposes in the present report an organizing framework built around six transitions, or investment pathways, for the effective delivery of high-impact, sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions to realize the Goals by 2030, namely: food systems; energy access and affordability; digital connectivity; education; jobs and social protection; and climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.



I. Introduction

1. The world is facing significant economic, social and environmental challenges in an era of growing risks and uncertainties. Shocks and crises have become more frequent, intense and widespread in an interconnected world, affecting a greater number of people over a larger geographical area. Economic, financial, social and health shocks are quickly spreading within and across countries and becoming crises; conflicts are the daily reality for millions of people around the world; and extreme weather events are occurring with increasing frequency.

2. Global efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger have faced setbacks owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, conflicts and other major shocks, further delaying the goal of ending poverty and hunger by 2030. In 2022, there were 23 million more people living in extreme poverty and 123 million more suffering from hunger as compared with 2019 (see [A/79/79–E/2024/54](#)). With the ongoing multiple crises, ending poverty remains in the distant future rather than by 2030, in particular in regions that lack the fiscal capacity to cope with economic stresses.

3. Shocks and crises that might have previously remained relatively contained within a well-defined geographical region are now propagated rapidly through globally interconnected systems and networks. The COVID-19 pandemic serves as a stark example of how interconnected networks can both contribute to and amplify the spread of crises worldwide. The virus spread quickly through a dense global network of transportation, and the economic effects of the virus moved at high speed through concentrated economic and financial networks. At the same time, information-sharing about the virus, treatments and vaccines travelled rapidly through compact scientific and policy networks. As a result, the COVID-19 experience reveals not only the vulnerabilities in our global network structure but also that enhanced resilience can come from deep interconnections.

4. The high cost of multiple overlapping crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and climate change, has brought the effectiveness of multilateral institutions to the forefront of international policymaking. There is a realization in many policy circles that the multilateral system is no longer able to anticipate and respond to such crises, which become systemic and greatly impact the global economy and the development prospects of developing countries.

5. The world is not on track to achieve most of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The 2024 assessment shows that only approximately 15 per cent of the Goal targets are on track; close to half, although showing signs of progress, are moderately or severely off track; and more than one third have seen either no movement or regressed below the 2015 baseline (*ibid.*). The implementation of the Goals has been too slow, even regressing in areas such as climate action, biodiversity loss and ending hunger before COVID-19, while suffering significant setbacks following the pandemic, including in poverty eradication, childhood vaccination and education.

6. Lessons learned from the thematic reviews and voluntary national reviews during the 2023 high-level political forum on sustainable development suggest that Member States could strengthen Sustainable Development Goal implementation by adopting a whole-of-government approach with a designated lead ministry; integrating the Goals in national development strategies; improving public awareness of the Goals; enhancing intra-government coordination, as well as coordination with other key stakeholders such as parliaments; enhancing access to high-quality data for monitoring; promoting South-South and trilateral cooperation in the sharing of successful Sustainable Development Goal experiences; creating incentives for the localization of the Goals; and undertaking periodic audits of Sustainable

Development Goal progress. In addition, the most critical element for achieving the Goals by 2030 is to improve the access of developing countries to financing, in particular concessional financing.

7. The present report¹ highlights a series of policy solutions with multiplier impacts across all the Sustainable Development Goals, with the aim of accelerating progress and effectively delivering sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions for achieving the Goals by 2030. It is complemented by the report of the Secretary-General on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (A/79/79-E/2024/54). It should also be read in conjunction with the report of the Secretary-General on the long-term impacts of current trends on the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (E/2024/55).

II. High cost of recurrent crises

8. The confluence of global and national catastrophic events is putting all countries, in particular developing countries, in perpetual crisis mode. Shocks that follow each other in quick succession are worse than if they had occurred further apart in time. Recurrent crises pose a unique challenge to the resilience capacity of systems, as they drain scarce resources needed for countries to cope with, and respond to, future shocks.² The high number of economic and financial crises experienced in recent decades exemplify this challenge. Since 2000, countries have grappled with a series of crises, such as the 2008 global financial crisis, the 2009 European sovereign debt crisis, the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and many other national crises. The war in Ukraine has added another layer of difficulties for countries already dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 health crisis.

9. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic alone, Governments financed more than 5,200 fiscal support policies in 2020 and 2021.³ This happened even as government revenue in developing countries declined substantially because of the pandemic. In sub-Saharan Africa, total government tax revenue decreased by 15 per cent in 2020 as compared with the prior year, a significantly greater decline than during the 2008 global financial crisis and the Ebola outbreak in 2012. Public debt in developing countries also increased significantly, from 58 to 65 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) from 2019 to 2021. Thirty countries in sub-Saharan Africa had a debt-to-GDP ratio exceeding 50 per cent in 2021. The cost of borrowing for emerging market economies has been increasing since a pandemic low in early 2021. This trend is likely to continue as central banks around the world raise interest rates to combat high inflation.

10. As a result, multiple overlapping crises have materially impacted the development prospects of developing countries. This impact has been borne particularly by the most vulnerable groups in developing countries, such as women and children, by raising the number of people pushed into poverty; weakening food security; increasing income and wealth inequality; widening gender gaps; having significant health consequences; and leading to high educational losses. It has been

¹ The present report is submitted in accordance with the mandate provided by the General Assembly in resolutions 61/16 and 72/305, as well as resolutions 74/298 and 75/290 A, on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council, and in alignment with General Assembly 75/290 B on the review of the implementation of resolutions 67/290 on the high-level political forum on sustainable development and 70/299 on the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level.

² Response capacity and resilience refer to a system's ability to withstand stressors and respond effectively to crises.

³ United Nations, COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker, available at <https://tracker.unescwa.org/>.

estimated that the current generation of students in developing countries risks losing \$17 trillion in lifetime earnings at present value, or about 18 per cent of global GDP in 2022, because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

11. The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have also led to major global output losses, which in the 2023–2030 period could amount to some \$51 trillion, according to a Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimate,⁴ while the annual investment gap for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 has increased from \$2.5 trillion to \$4.2 trillion, or \$34 trillion cumulatively.⁵ In 2022, the average GDP of developing countries was 3.8 per cent lower than the level estimated prior to the pandemic, compared with 2 per cent in developed countries. As a result, the average economic growth of the least developed countries in the 2020–2022 period (2.5 per cent) has fallen well short of the 7 per cent Goal 8 target. In addition, crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, along with growing economic and political fragmentation, have caused a considerable negative shock to global trade. This has meant that many countries, in particular developing countries, have seen a major deterioration in their debt and fiscal space, which undermines growth and sustainable development prospects. While developed economies have largely bounced back from COVID-19, developing economies have lost ground.

12. Economic losses caused by climate change have also been higher and more persistent in developing countries with inadequate capacity to adapt, weaker institutions and infrastructure and insufficient financial capacity, despite these countries bearing little responsibility for this problem. Recent analysis conducted by S&P Global Ratings suggests that lower-income and lower-middle-income countries are likely to see 3.6 times greater losses on average in economic output than upper-middle- and high-income countries owing to climate change.

III. Sustainable Development Goal investment as a resilience-building strategy to mitigate the impact of crises

13. The magnitude of fallout from a shock or a crisis and the extent of challenges faced by a country is determined by its degree of vulnerability and exposure. More specifically, the scale, intensity and duration of the impact of a crisis are determined by the national resilience capacity, or the state of the human, physical and natural capital, which involves a combination of factors, such as governance, infrastructure, institutional capacity, human development, social cohesion, economic strength and natural resources. The three types of capital provide the essential resources, skills and infrastructure necessary to adapt, withstand and recover from shocks and crises.

14. The resilience capacity of a country also includes how quickly all those elements can be mobilized when faced with a crisis. The human, physical and natural capital are interconnected. For example, the scarring of the human capital caused by a crisis can hinder economic recovery and development, which, in turn, affects environmental conservation efforts. Conversely, environmental degradation can lead to social and political instability, with negative implications for economic growth. Many developing countries are highly vulnerable to a shock or a crisis because of factors such as high levels of poverty, inequality and unemployment; weak institutions; lack of resources; limited infrastructure; undeveloped emergency and disaster management capacity; fragile public health systems; and limited fiscal capacity.

⁴ *World Social Report 2024* (United Nations publication, forthcoming).

⁵ *Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2024: Financing for Development at a Crossroads* (United Nations publication, 2024).

15. The COVID-19 experience illustrates this point well. The combination of relatively abundant human, physical and natural capital and low structural inequalities in many developed countries placed them in a better position to mitigate the impact of the crisis. Developing countries, on the other hand, faced the COVID-19 crisis from a position of significant weakness and incurred much higher costs.

16. The experience from multiple overlapping crises shows that Sustainable Development Goal investment serves as a cost-effective resilience-building strategy because it addresses the economic, social and environmental challenges simultaneously. The COVID-19 experience has shown that countries that had made more progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals were better equipped to deal with the impact of the pandemic. Investment in the Goals not only materially improved the lives of people in those countries but also served as a cost-effective strategy to mitigate the impact of an unexpected crisis. Countries that had achieved greater access to clean water, reduced the number of people living in slums and decreased pre-existing health conditions such as non-communicable diseases were in a better position to mitigate the COVID-19 risk, in particular in the period prior to the availability of vaccines and treatments. Similarly, past progress in introducing inclusive social protection systems, robust universal health care and effective public institutions, as well as smartphone and Internet penetration, all contributed to more successful containment measures and coping capacities.

IV. Sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions for revitalizing Sustainable Development Goal implementation

17. In major reports, such as the Global Sustainable Development Reports 2019 and 2023, the interlinkages across the Sustainable Development Goals have been stressed and a holistic approach to their implementation has been recommended. There is a growing body of analytical evidence on Goal interlinkages, international spillovers and scenario modelling that can inform policies to manage the trade-offs and maximize synergies between the Goals and across borders. In the aforementioned reports, seven Goals are identified as particularly synergistic: Goal 1 (no poverty), Goal 3 (good health and well-being), Goal 4 (quality education), Goal 5 (gender equality), Goal 6 (water and sanitation), Goal 7 (clean and affordable energy) and Goal 17 (partnerships). In addition, the reports have highlighted that a focus on younger, female and rural populations is critical for fostering synergy in Goal implementation.

18. Building on the expert analysis and recommendations contained in the Global Sustainable Development Reports 2019 and 2023, six transitions are proposed as an organizing framework for investing in policy solutions to accelerate Sustainable Development Goal progress within and across countries. The United Nations development system has also been mobilized to support developing countries in accelerating Goal progress through the implementation of a series of high-impact initiatives that are directly linked to the six transitions.

19. This section discusses how the six transitions, namely food systems, energy access and affordability, digital connectivity, education, jobs and social protection, and climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, can be achieved through the implementation of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions that effectively leverage synergies across the Sustainable Development Goals.

A. Food systems

20. Transforming food systems to increase their sustainability is critical to eradicating poverty, ending hunger and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Some 1.3 billion tons of food waste is generated each year owing to unsustainable practices. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has estimated that the global hidden costs of agrifood systems amount to at least \$10 trillion, or about 10 per cent of global GDP, with a disproportionate share borne by low-income countries, where the average cost is 27 per cent.⁶ This signals that investing in agrifood systems in low-income countries to manage trade-offs will be critical in addressing these hidden costs, in particular those related to poverty and undernourishment. Malawi, for example, has decided to rebuild its irrigation infrastructure by 2031 in order to increase agricultural productivity and integrate smallholder farming enterprises into food value chains.⁷

21. Innovations to transform food systems to ensure affordable, sustainable and diversified nutritional sources for all is critical, as they can engender profound cross-cutting externalities across all the Sustainable Development Goals, including opportunities to advance gender equality, given the large number of women employed in agriculture. However, a series of factors have made this transformation challenging. For example, while climate change continues to impinge on crop yields and agricultural productivity, the rapid financialization of food markets, coupled with ongoing armed conflicts, is weighing down on food accessibility and affordability and contributing to unprecedented price increases. At the same time, soil erosion and shrinking water reservoirs are impacting food supplies even as demand increases. Approximately 35 per cent of arable land at present is degraded owing to human activity and needs restoration before it can sustain adequate crop levels again, according to FAO.⁸

22. In December 2023, at the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 134 world leaders signed the United Arab Emirates Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action. In the Declaration, the Heads of State and Government emphasized that countries must put food systems and agriculture at the heart of their climate ambitions. Governments and other stakeholders also announced at the conference the mobilization of more than \$2.5 billion in funding to support food security while combating climate change. Many countries are already taking proactive measures to ensure food system sustainability. In Tajikistan, the Global Good Agricultural Practices Standards were recently introduced to ensure climate-smart agricultural growth that does not impinge on the long-term sustainability of natural resources. Germany has also decided to prioritize financial support for the global smallholder farming and food security agenda.

Leveraging smart technologies

23. Leveraging technology is vital to the sustainable transformation of food systems across all stages: production, transportation and trade. For example, soil analytics,

⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *The State of Food and Agriculture: Revealing the True Cost of Food to Transform Agrifood Systems* (Rome, 2023).

⁷ Country examples in the present report generally emanate from the most recent voluntary national review reports presented at the 2023 high-level political forum on sustainable development or statements made by Member States at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit 2023.

⁸ FAO, *The State of the World's Land and Water Resources for Food and Agriculture: Systems at Breaking Point* (Rome, 2021).

smart irrigation systems, connected sensors and artificial intelligence can be used to improve crop yields and foreplan for threats. E-commerce solutions connecting consumers with producers can also help eliminate inefficiencies across the food value chain and reduce transaction costs. The use of blockchain can similarly facilitate transparency and traceability and in turn aid in the certification of agricultural products. Integrated modern logistics solutions, including transportation and storage facilities operating on clean energy, can also alleviate food wastage and enable small-scale farmers to market their produce in larger markets. The successful implementation of a digital infrastructure in agriculture alone could contribute \$500 billion in additional value to global economic output by 2030.⁹ Although emerging technological solutions have the potential to transform agriculture, enhancing access to them is contingent upon the scaling up of investment, technology transfer and development cooperation while closing digital divides, which necessitates a coordinated global approach.

Promoting circular agriculture

24. Circular agriculture offers a practical solution for transforming food systems amid current challenges.¹⁰ In circular agriculture, the reuse and recycling of materials are not seen as a separate step to close the circle but as an integrated part of the production and use phase. Although agriculture has historically been based on a circular model, the imperative to enhance yields to keep up with demand led to its decline in favour of conventional linear agriculture. However, the combination of increasing circular farming yields and a shift in consumer preferences towards organic crops has led to its revival and increasing uptake. Specific circular agricultural practices that countries can adopt include mixed farming, organic agriculture, agroforestry, water reuse and wastewater recycling. Bhutan has become the first country to set a target of shifting its entire agricultural system to an organic model by 2025.

B. Energy access and affordability: the bedrock of sustainable development

25. The world is not on course to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 7 by 2030. Currently, 685 million people globally lack access to electricity (Goal target 7.1) (ibid.). Factors such as COVID-19 and the Ukraine conflict disrupted progress. Projections suggest that, by 2030, 660 million will still lack electricity, with sub-Saharan Africa accounting for 83 per cent. Some 2.1 billion also continue to rely on coal, kerosene or solid biomass as their primary cooking fuel, with this number expected to decline to 1.7 billion people by 2030 (ibid.). The lack of clean cooking methods is contributing to nearly 3.7 million premature deaths annually, with women and children most at risk.¹¹ However, the uptake of renewable energy (Goal target 7.2), has grown but efforts and innovations need to be scaled up in order to substantially increase the share of this energy source. Likewise, the rate of improvement in energy efficiency (Goal target 7.3) is not on track to double by 2030. Increased investment in energy is also critical because of its multiplier impact across many Goals (e.g. Goals 3, 4, 8 and 13).

26. Annual global investment in clean energy reached an all-time high of \$1.7 trillion in 2023 but will have to increase to \$2.8 trillion by 2030 to meet rising

⁹ Lutz Goedde and others, "Agriculture's connected future: how technology can yield new growth", McKinsey and Company, October 2020.

¹⁰ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Circular agriculture for rural sustainable development", policy brief No. 105, May 2021.

¹¹ International Energy Agency, *A Vision for Clean Cooking Access for All* (2023).

energy needs and align with the climate goals as set out in the Paris Agreement.¹² Annual clean energy investment is rising at a faster rate than investment in fossil fuels. Increased volatility in fossil fuel markets has accelerated the momentum behind the deployment of a range of clean energy technologies. Transforming the global energy system with a focus on access and affordability has become paramount for achieving global development aspirations and goals. This is precisely why ensuring universal access to energy is at the centre of a just energy transition.

27. Renewable energy now accounts for more than 28 per cent of global electricity production, growing by nearly 5 per cent since 2015. The Government of India has announced plans to meet half of its electricity requirements from renewables by 2030. Renewable electricity is growing at a faster rate in India than in any other major economy. Globally, renewables are already the fastest growing source of energy in buildings; the electric vehicles industry is growing rapidly, 20 and 22 per cent of new cars bought in Europe in 2021 and 2022, respectively, were electric vehicles; Thailand has set a target of 26 per cent electric vehicles for its total vehicle fleet by 2027; favourable economics have greatly boosted the use of rooftop solar systems; and wind power accounts for a substantial share of electricity generation in a number of countries, such as Denmark (58 per cent), Uruguay (40 per cent), Ireland (38 per cent) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (24 per cent).¹³

Stepping up clean energy technology investment and transfer

28. To ensure that all members of the global population have access to electricity by 2030, the annual growth rate of 0.7 per cent in the 2010–2021 period would need to rise to 1.0 per cent in the remaining years of the Sustainable Development Goal period. At the same time, the share of renewables of the global energy mix would need to increase to between 33 and 38 per cent by 2030, if the 1.5°C target is to be achieved. Since the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015, most renewable energy investments have occurred in developed countries. Developing countries, despite needing approximately \$1.7 trillion annually in renewable energy generation and transmission infrastructure, managed to attract only a third of this amount in 2022.¹⁴ While developed countries need to play their part and scale up climate finance, it is also critical to leverage private capital by reducing the risks of investments in renewables in developing countries, including through more effective regulations.

29. Technology transfer will also need to play a critical role in scaling up the access of developing countries to clean energy. Greenfield investment projects for developing solar and wind energy generation equipment, batteries and transmission infrastructure in developing countries, many of which supply raw materials for these, can reduce renewable energy costs significantly and alleviate supply-side constraints. Similarly, investing in facilities located in developing countries to manufacture clean cooking stoves would be a cost-effective intervention in the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 7. In addition, modern cooking stoves relying on sustainable fuels are more efficient and have better ventilation than traditional stoves. Building national capacity for renewable energy technologies remains a key factor to facilitate the development and use of renewables in developing countries. All of the aforementioned require significant technology transfer and mobilization of resources.

¹² International Energy Agency and the International Finance Corporation, *Scaling Up Private Finance for Clean Energy in Emerging and Developing Economies* (2023).

¹³ REN21, *Renewables 2021: Global Status Report* (Paris, 2021).

¹⁴ *World Investment Report 2023: Investing in Sustainable Energy for All* (United Nations publication, 2023).

Unlocking energy efficiency opportunities and value

30. With demand for energy increasing rapidly in most developing countries, it has become critical to unlock innovative energy efficiency solutions across the board to reduce their carbon footprints, enhance economic growth and improve the quality of life for all citizens. This includes increasing investment in developing countries in renewable energy sources and improving the quality of distribution and transmission channels through better infrastructure and technologies. For example, greater use of technologies to minimize distribution losses is key to enhancing energy efficiency in many developing countries. There is also often significant scope to make buildings and appliances more energy-efficient, which contributes to less air pollution and improves health and lowers CO₂ emissions. The International Energy Agency has estimated that implementing energy efficiency measures in buildings alone could lead to cost savings amounting to \$830 billion by 2040. Costa Rica is an example of a developing country that has used renewables and energy efficiency measures to generate more than 98 per cent of its electricity needs.

C. Digital connectivity: an opportunity for economic leapfrogging

31. A digital public infrastructure constitutes the rails on which digital products, services and innovations can be built for the benefit of the whole of society. The three key components of such rails include: (a) digital identity systems, (b) electronic payment systems and (c) data exchange systems, which, along with open digital and technology standards and protocols, are critical to ensure interoperability. An affordable digital public infrastructure is necessary to ensure that digital connectivity can grow at a rapid pace in industry, business, government and society in developing countries.

32. In a 2023 study, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Dalberg Global Development Advisors concluded that the implementation of an effective digital public infrastructure in the financial sector in low- and middle-income countries by 2030 could accelerate economic growth by up to 33 per cent.¹⁵ They estimated that the implementation of an effective digital public infrastructure in low- and middle-income countries could increase their combined GDP by \$19.2 trillion by 2030, two years earlier than otherwise projected by the World Bank.¹⁶ The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has also forecast that the digital transformation could reduce global CO₂ emissions by at least 20 per cent, the use of natural resources in products by 90 per cent and waste and detoxifying supply chains by a factor of 10–100, all critical for transformational economic change and accelerated progress towards many Sustainable Development Goals.

Delivering equitable e-government services

33. The introduction of an effective digital public infrastructure can help streamline the delivery of public services and enable Governments to better target vulnerable groups through innovations and measures such as: expanding digital banking and payment platforms; automating processes; reducing paperwork; registering workers; supporting inspection and compliance; and enabling citizens to access services remotely without discrimination. During COVID-19, a number of Governments in developing countries were able to provide emergency relief payments to workers in the informal sector, as well as other vulnerable groups which lost their livelihoods,

¹⁵ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Dalberg Advisors, *The Human and Economic Impact of Digital Public Infrastructure* (New York, UNDP, 2023).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

because of the existence of a digital public infrastructure in the form of identification, data-sharing and cash transfer systems.

34. Health-care and social services providers could also use digital identity solutions to improve the availability of such support to those most in need. A digital public infrastructure in the form of personal identification systems has also enabled many developing countries to rapidly expand the number of people with access to a financial account. In addition, some developing countries have been able to expand social protection by using open artificial intelligence algorithms and models to identify vulnerable populations and provide contactless payments. Furthermore, the introduction of a digital public infrastructure has contributed to improved access to judicial services for people living in poverty because of lower legal costs, less corruption and a shorter timespan required to process civil cases.

Improving financial inclusion

35. The existence of an effective public digital infrastructure is key to enabling financial service providers and businesses to leverage technology to facilitate secure and efficient payments to support the lives and livelihoods of disadvantaged groups in society. Uganda, for example, has strengthened its public digital infrastructure to ensure more inclusive financial services and improved connectivity. The digital revolution can also serve as a catalyst for accelerating the informal to formal economy transition in developing countries, which is critical for sustained reduction in poverty and inequality, as well as enhanced effectiveness of the business sector. However, despite progress in this area, almost 30 per cent of people in developing countries are still unable to access formal financial channels.¹⁷ Scaling up financial inclusion, especially with digital technologies, can be a key driver of development. This is important because financial exclusion generally correlates with other sources of inequality.

D. Education: the ladder to future prosperity

36. School closures caused by COVID-19 have resulted in major educational losses among children in developing countries furthest behind in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4.¹⁸ This impact has been particularly severe in the countries that did not have sufficient resources to provide equitable distance learning opportunities to all children.¹⁹ High-income countries, in comparison, were able to resume education more quickly than most developing countries.

37. At a time when developing countries are facing profound technological and demographic changes, the provision of equitable education opportunities for all children has emerged as central to poverty eradication and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and their long-term development prospects. Providing all children with equal access to quality education is critical to reversing the intergenerational cycles of poverty and inequality. Investments in education have a strong multiplier effect across all other dimensions of well-being, especially health, women's empowerment and the alleviation of inequalities.

¹⁷ Asli Demirgüç-Kunt and others, *The Global Findex Database 2021: Financial Inclusion, Digital Payments and Resilience in the Age of COVID-19* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2022).

¹⁸ Jaime Saavedra, Stefania Giannini and Robert Jenkins, "The State of the global education crisis: a path to recovery", World Bank blogs, 11 December 2021.

¹⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Global Education Monitoring Report 2021/2: Non-State Actors in Education – Who Chooses? Who Loses?* (Paris, 2021).

38. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is spearheading the follow-up to the Transforming Education Summit held in 2022 within the United Nations system and, with the Government of Sierra Leone, co-chairing the SDG 4-Education 2030 High-level Steering Committee, whose task is to mobilize political commitment to accelerate the transformation of education and its financing. UNESCO will be convening a Global Education Meeting in 2024 to take stock of the outcome of the Transforming Education Summit.

Ensuring education for all

39. Available evidence reveals that both underinvestment and inequity remain serious challenges in public and global education financing in developing countries. Learners from disadvantaged communities in developing countries tend to benefit disproportionately less from both public and private sources of funding, facing multiple learning barriers associated with gender, ethnicity, disability, residency and other context-specific challenges.²⁰ Children living in poverty are also less likely to have access to a school, and when they do, are more at risk of dropping out sooner owing to economic reasons. The children from the lowest household income brackets are also more likely to be in the segments of the education system that receive less funding per capita.

40. It is estimated that low- and middle-income countries face an annual financing gap of \$97 billion to reach national Sustainable Development Goal 4 targets.²¹ Limited public education funding for these countries is especially concerning given that many of them experienced longer school closures during COVID-19 and saw a greater increase in learning disparities. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has estimated that a 1 percentage point increase in public funding for education in developing countries could pull 35 million of the 731 million primary-aged children out of learning poverty.²²

Enhancing digital education and skills

41. Securing equitable access to high quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all is central to eradicating poverty and achieving progress across the Sustainable Development Goals. Technology can be critical in accelerating progress towards quality education in developing countries. Tools such as online learning platforms and digital libraries can enable remote and blended learning models to reach students in underserved areas. They can also be used for teacher training and in turn raise the quality of learning in developing countries currently lagging behind. However, careful consideration of the local context and equitable implementation is key to ensure that technology contributes effectively to quality education for all and does not exacerbate inequalities, including gender inequalities, due to discrepancies in access to digital tools.

E. Jobs and social protection: eradicating poverty by breaking the vicious cycle of informal employment and low pay

42. Estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO) indicate that the global jobs gap stood at 435 million people in 2023, with about 2 billion people

²⁰ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), “Transforming education with equitable financing”, January 2023.

²¹ UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023: Technology in Education – A Tool on Whose Terms?* (Paris, 2023).

²² UNICEF, “Transforming education with equitable financing”.

employed in the informal sector, of whom 740 million, or 37 per cent, were women.²³ Global employment growth decelerated in 2023 compared with 2022, or from 2.3 per cent to an estimated 1.0 per cent. Global unemployment in 2023 was approximately 208 million workers, according to ILO, corresponding to a 5.8 per cent unemployment rate.

43. By the latest estimates, only 47 per cent of the global population has access to at least one social protection benefit (Sustainable Development Goal 1.3), meaning that more than 4 billion people still lack any social protection.²⁴ Globally, there is a nearly 25 percentage point gap between the male and female labour force participation rates.²⁵ The economic losses due to the disempowerment of women have been estimated to range from 10 per cent of GDP in advanced economies to more than 30 per cent in South Asia and in the Middle East and North Africa. Countries are recognizing the need to address this gap. Egypt, for example, has committed to increasing women's participation in the labour force by nearly 70 per cent from 2020 to 2030, and Bangladesh aims to raise the share of women employed in the technology sector by 25 per cent by 2026.

44. Achieving Sustainable Development Goal target 1.3 on social protection systems for all in developing countries by 2030 is estimated to cost \$1.2 trillion, or 3.8 per cent of their combined GDP.²⁶ For low-income countries, the financing gap is estimated at \$78 billion per year, or close to 16 per cent of their combined GDP on average. The Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions,²⁷ led by ILO, aims to raise \$120 million towards this end by 2030. Additional financing for Goal target 1.3 could come from reformed or more effective tax-based revenue and domestic carbon pricing, with a portion of the income from developed countries committed to strengthening social protection systems in developing countries.²⁸ Other financing options for strengthening social protection in developing countries include: reallocating public expenditures; expanding social security scheme contributory revenues; official development assistance; and eliminating illicit financing flows. Governments in developing countries could also reduce spending inefficiencies, tackle corruption and shift budget allocations away from military expenditures.

Modernizing social protection systems

45. The technological revolution, including the shift to digital technologies and artificial intelligence, poses a formidable challenge to social protection systems – if the benefits of these technologies are not effectively distributed, inequality in society will grow. In the new technological era, social safety nets have become a key public policy instrument. While the new forms of employment provide greater flexibility to enterprises and workers and lower the cost of service delivery, they can also translate into reduced and more volatile earnings and higher levels of income insecurity, unregulated working conditions and non-existent, or limited, social protection for workers. Several innovative policy solutions can help address these gaps: the coverage of legislative frameworks can be broadened to include workers on digital

²³ International Labour Organization (ILO), *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2024* (Geneva, 2024).

²⁴ ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2023* (Geneva, 2023).

²⁵ ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2024*.

²⁶ Fabio Durán-Valverde and others, *Financing Gaps in Social Protection: Global Estimates and Strategies for Developing Countries in Light of the COVID-19 Crisis and Beyond*, ILO Working Paper, No. 14 (Geneva, October 2020).

²⁷ For more information about the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection, see www.unglobalaccelerator.org/.

²⁸ *Global Sustainable Development Report 2023: Times of Crisis, Times of Change – Science for Accelerating Transformation to Sustainable Development* (United Nations publication, 2023).

platforms; minimum thresholds on enterprise size, working time or earnings for contributions could be lowered or removed in order to expand social protection coverage to all workers and create a level playing field for all employers; and it may be possible to simplify administrative requirements, for example, by using mobile platforms.

F. Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution: mitigating the triple planetary crisis

46. Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution are the result of more than a century of unsustainable energy and land use, lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production. Climate change is causing extreme weather events that have exposed millions of people to acute food and water insecurity, threatening livelihoods and imposing high health costs, especially for the most vulnerable. UNEP has estimated that CO₂ emissions will need to decrease by 7.6 per cent annually until 2030 in order to achieve the 1.5°C target, but this figure would have been 3.3 per cent if countries had taken decisive action a decade ago.²⁹ Over the past 10 years, storms, wildfires and floods alone have caused losses of approximately 0.3 per cent of GDP globally, according to data from the Swiss Re insurance company.³⁰ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its sixth assessment report,³¹ has concluded that between 3.3 and 3.6 billion people live in areas that are highly vulnerable to climate change, thus reinforcing the need for adaptation.

47. One million of the world's estimated 8 million species of plants and animals now face a heightened risk of extinction.³² More than half of the global GDP is dependent upon nature, and more than 1 billion people rely on forests for their livelihoods. Population growth, climate change, urbanization and trends in global markets and trade are some of the indirect pressures on biodiversity, while direct threats come from changes in land use and water management, deforestation, excessive use of pesticides and fertilizers, pollution and ecosystem degradation. Higher temperatures are similarly causing irreversible harm for marine life and coastal ecosystems. This in turn not only accelerates climate change but also threatens the livelihoods of a large number of people who are reliant on the ocean economy. At the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in December 2022, 188 Governments agreed to mobilize at least \$200 billion per year in biodiversity-related funding from public and private sources.

48. More than 99 per cent of people globally breathe unsafe air, which is exposing them to the risk of stroke, heart and lung diseases, cancer and more, according to UNEP. At least 1.7 billion people also use drinking water contaminated with faeces, according to the World Health Organization. Globally, air and water pollution are the cause of more than 6.7 and 1.4 million deaths annually, respectively, according to the most recent estimate by the Lancet Commission on pollution and health (2019). Both air and water pollution are likely to increase substantially in the coming decade owing to population and economic growth if current policies are not changed. Improving air

²⁹ United Nations Environment Programme, *Emissions Gap Report 2019* (Nairobi, 2019).

³⁰ S&P Global Ratings, "Weather warning: assessing countries' vulnerability to economic losses from physical climate risks", 27 April 2022.

³¹ Pörtner and others, eds., *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Working Group II Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2022). Available at www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/.

³² Eduardo Sonnabend Brondízio and others, eds., *The Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (Bonn, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Service, 2019).

and water quality is also critical for improving health outcomes, especially for the most vulnerable groups in developing countries. Such action can deliver significant cross-cutting development dividends. Not taking action threatens to undermine progress across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Promoting sustainable transportation

49. Transportation on land, sea and air remains dependent on internal combustion engines that operate on fossil fuels. The transport sector currently accounts for more than a third of global CO₂ emissions, growing at an annual average rate of 1.7 per cent since 1990, the joint highest for any sector, along with industry.³³ However, subsidies have driven a significant uptake of electric vehicles in many developed countries in recent years, although their adoption in developing countries has been limited. International cooperation to promote the transfer of electric vehicle technology in a manner that reduces their production costs, along with enhanced support for Governments to adopt the necessary policies, is needed for greater uptake of electric vehicles in developing countries.

50. There is also a need for strengthened cooperation between the public and private sectors in developed and developing countries to develop new types of batteries that correspond to the resource endowments of different countries. Some positive examples have already started to emerge. Members of the Gulf Cooperation Council have launched the Middle East Green Initiative, a regional effort to address climate change that also encompasses the circular carbon economy approach, targeting net-zero emissions. While the early focus of efforts in this area has often been on road transportation, reducing CO₂ emissions in the shipping and aviation sectors is also critically important. Internationally agreed standards, regulations and targets are needed to reduce CO₂ emissions from these two sectors, along with the development and application of more fuel-efficient technologies.

Decarbonizing industry

51. Global greenhouse gas emissions must peak by 2025 for the 1.5°C target to be achieved, according to the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.³⁴ The industrial sector is currently responsible for nearly one third of global carbon emissions. Just three industries: iron and steel, chemicals and cement making, account for roughly 55 per cent of the global industrial carbon emissions, and the top 10 industries are responsible for roughly 90 per cent of the total. Both developed and developing countries need to put in place strategies to significantly reduce carbon emissions from industrial operations. The Government of Guyana has adopted a low carbon development strategy, in which it sets out a vision for growing the economy fivefold over a 10-year period while keeping energy emissions flat. Azerbaijan has adopted a policy to boost foreign direct investment in non-hydrocarbon sectors by 10 to 15 per cent annually.

Sustainable consumption and production processes

52. Promoting sustainable consumption and production processes by decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation, promoting resource efficiency and transitioning to a cyclical economic model is critical to combating climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. Luxembourg has taken steps in this direction by

³³ International Energy Agency, www.iea.org/energy-system/transport.

³⁴ Priyadarshi R. Shukla and others, eds., *Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change – Working Group III Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2022). Available at www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/.

developing frameworks and tools to move towards the circular economy. One area that can deliver far-reaching impact is the transition to green value chains, which can lower the environmental damage caused by distributed international production. An indispensable part of the push towards the goal of sustainable consumption and production is educating consumers to ensure that their preferences gravitate towards supporting sustainable products and services. In 2022, green goods defied the downward trend in global trade, growing by 5 per cent as their combined value hit a record \$1.9 trillion, or \$100 billion higher than in 2021.³⁵

V. Conclusion

53. Multiple overlapping crises have imposed high costs on all countries, in particular developing countries, and undermined progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including global efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and end hunger. This impact has been borne particularly by the most vulnerable groups in society, such as women and children. The experience from recent crises shows that countries that have made more progress in achieving the Goals were in a better position to deal with them. Sustainable Development Goal investment served as a cost-effective resilience-building strategy to mitigate the impact of unexpected crises.

54. The Sustainable Development Goals have taken a firm root across most sectors of society and the different levels of government, which greatly improves the prospects for their achievement. But aspirations and commitments have not yet translated into sufficiently strong national action and implementation at the scale necessary for the goals to be achieved by 2030, mostly owing to financial constraints such as high debt levels and borrowing costs and the limited fiscal space of many developing countries. Strengthening the public administration capacity of Governments, in particular in developing countries, has been shown to make a vast difference in Goal implementation, in particular in terms of improving the quality of people's lives.

55. Key transitions in critical areas, such as food systems, energy, digital connectivity, education, jobs and social protection and climate change, biodiversity and pollution, are essential for advancing sustainable development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

56. For food systems, the environmental, social and economic costs of the “linear” nature of modern food production are significant. Food-related CO₂ emissions could double by 2050 unless there are significant changes to current unsustainable food systems and consumption patterns. Analysis conducted by FAO shows that Sustainable Development Goal targets for ending hunger and achieving food security can be achieved with a modest expansion of agricultural output if agricultural systems become more sustainable and equitable.

57. In energy, the just energy transition presents one of the greatest investment opportunities since the Industrial Revolution. Accelerating the renewables revolution, including with mechanisms that ensure that technologies are accessible and affordable to developing countries, is critical for furthering energy security, while keeping the 1.5°C target alive.

58. The digital revolution offers developing countries an opportunity to bypass a structural transformation pathway anchored in the rapid expansion of a highly polluting manufacturing sector to one with a lighter environmental footprint and greater emphasis on growth in services.

³⁵ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, “Global trade update”, March 2023.

59. Quality education is central to achieving progress across the Sustainable Development Goals. The digital transition can help ensure access to education if gaps are closed and digital literacy is prioritized.

60. Likewise, amid multiple crises and growing fiscal challenges, the strengthening of jobs and social protection is critical for enhanced human well-being, including the eradication of poverty, economic transformation and reduced exposure and vulnerability of developing countries to systemic shocks and crises.

61. The links between climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution point to a fundamental issue: our economic systems are based on flawed economics. We are forever reacting to market failures when we should be pursuing proactive strategies to shape the economy for the common good. Bad accounting makes us look wealthier when we are actually becoming poorer, depleting the sources of our well-being at the cost of future generations. Billions of people still lack access to water, sanitation and hygiene. Water scarcity is a growing problem in many parts of the world, and conflicts and climate change are exacerbating this challenge. Water pollution is also a profound challenge, affecting human health and the environment in many countries.

62. The experience of recent multiple crises has shown that the global system is only as strong as its weakest link. This means that further strengthening of multilateral cooperation is critical to achieving a sustainable and resilient recovery for countries, individually and collectively.

VI. Recommendations

63. The present report makes the following recommendations for reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises:

(a) Countries need to turbocharge Sustainable Development Goal implementation in the second half of the Goal period by putting in place policies that drive a transformation towards sustainable development. This includes: integrating the Goals into all relevant decision-making, financing and accountability mechanisms; establishing effective partnerships and coordination with key stakeholders; fostering strong engagement and ownership of the Goals among young people; and making concerted efforts to enhance the quality of data for Goal monitoring, for example, through enhanced capacity-building support for developing countries;

(b) Countries need to accord high priority to poverty eradication and ending hunger in the remaining years of the Sustainable Development Goal period. When people are lifted out of poverty and hunger, they can contribute to and benefit from a thriving economy, creating a cycle of prosperity that fosters national resilience to the impact of unexpected shocks and crises;

(c) At the global level, Member States need to consider new approaches to debt sustainability, as well as address the debt challenges of developing countries by strengthening debt crisis prevention, finding solutions for countries that face high levels of debt and other constraints that prevent them from investing in the Sustainable Development Goals and establishing a more effective debt crisis resolution mechanism;

(d) Countries, individually and through enhanced multilateral cooperation, need to work together to improve development financing, including concessional financing, as a key element to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals;

(e) The leveraging of smart technologies and the promotion of circular agriculture is a key strategy for reducing the high cost of food systems on the environment, including through greater use of mixed farming, organic agriculture, agroforestry, water reuse and wastewater recycling;

(f) To ensure an equitable global energy transition, it is critical to support developing nations in their efforts to embrace clean energy sources by accelerating the renewables revolution through the adoption of the necessary technologies, policies and business strategies;

(g) The introduction of an effective digital public infrastructure can help streamline the delivery of both public and financial services and enable Governments to better target vulnerable groups in society. To take advantage of the new digital technologies, developing countries need to increase their investment in education, health care, social protection and public administration capacity;

(h) Concrete efforts are required to ensure that public education funding more effectively reaches the most vulnerable children in society, including those living in poverty. Investments in science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields education and digital skills, especially for girls, can also help build capacities for coordinated progress across the Sustainable Development Goals;

(i) In the new technological era, the establishment of effective and inclusive social safety nets has become a critical enabling factor to ensure that economic benefits are equitably distributed. This includes stepping up international solidarity with developing countries and making sure that their social protection systems are able to cope with the ongoing transition towards the digital economy;

(j) The promotion of sustainable transportation, consumption and production processes and decarbonization in industry is critical for the decoupling of economic growth from environmental degradation, enhanced resource efficiency and the shift to a sustainable economic model, all critical factors for combating climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution;

(k) The high economic, social and environmental costs of recent multiple crises must be used by the international community to renew multilateral cooperation, including institutions such as the United Nations that sustain it;

(l) The United Nations development system has an important role to play in supporting the efforts of programme countries to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including poverty eradication, in the second half of the Sustainable Development Goal period. This includes providing financial and technical support in implementing the six transitions/investment pathways through high-impact solutions, aimed at revitalizing Sustainable Development Goal progress.
