



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

The United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) met virtually from 7 to 16 July. The HLPF is the core UN platform where governments, civil society and other actors meet to review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda was adopted by all Heads of State and Government in 2015. It outlines countries' vision of the world in 2030 and contains 17 ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The theme of the meeting was: "Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development". The discussions were held against a very different backdrop compared to what was expected when the theme was chosen last fall, with the major COVID-19 crisis unfolding.

Impact of COVID-19 on the SDGs

Much of the Forum's attention was thus dedicated to the impact of COVID-19 on the SDGs. The discussions showed countries' commitment to a multilateral response to COVID-19 and their determination to continue to forge ahead with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. A key message was that the response to COVID-19 should kick off the major changes we need in order to realize the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

[The meeting brought together the Prime Ministers of Norway and India, over 100 Ministers and Vice-Ministers as well as hundreds of policy makers from around the world, along with Members of Parliament, NGOs, think tanks, academia and the business sector.]

The event started on a sobering note: the pandemic risks reversing decades of progress on poverty and hunger and places even greater obstacles on the way to many SDGs. The [SDG Progress Chart 2020](#) by UN DESA already shows that poverty is on the rise for the first time in decades; hunger continues to increase; many people don't have access to safe drinking water or sanitation services; inequalities are on the rise and so is the number of people living in slums. Terrestrial and marine biodiversity is threatened and a large number of species face extinction.

The SDGs are the world's guidepost to build back better

At the same time, the HLPF presented a more optimistic message: the recovery from the pandemic can provide a window of opportunity to realize the structural changes that will lead to realizing the SDGs and delivering effective climate action. For this to happen, the SDGs need to be the world's guidepost to "build back better and greener".

Another motto of the discussion was that no one must be left behind: the pandemic affects more dramatically certain groups in society and women and girls as well as countries in special situations, such as least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, and small island developing States. Participants discussed solutions to resume and accelerate progress towards the SDGs. Those include building more resilient, sustainable and nutritious food systems; improving human well being across the board; enhancing access to energy; as well as using science and

technology to combat inequalities and decouple economic growth from natural resource use. Much attention was paid to the need to mobilize more financial resources and address challenges relating to debt for the countries particularly affected by COVID-19. All agreed that we need global, national and local actions engaging all groups in society.

47 countries presented Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)

As a highlight of the meeting, forty-seven countries from all over the world presented voluntary national reviews (VNRs) of their implementation of the 2030 Agenda, subjecting themselves to questions from other countries and major groups, including NGOs, youth and the business sector. Governments usually also engage various stakeholders in the conduct of their VNRs at national level, although some groups would like to see greater participation.

Most of the VNR countries came from Africa (16), followed by Asia Pacific (11), Europe (11) and Latin America and the Caribbean (9). The VNRs have had a positive impact at home; many countries said they speeded up the integration of the 2030 Agenda into their development plans and into different sectors.

In general, many countries have adjusted their strategies and aligned budgets to achieve the SDGs. In fact, many strengthened or created new institutions to support the implementation of the SDGs. At the same time, countries underlined numerous challenges. Those included poverty; access to quality education; social inequalities; unsustainable consumption and production patterns; climate action; biodiversity; overfishing and vulnerability to natural disasters; gender inequality and gender-based violence; ineffective monitoring and evaluation systems; lack of data especially for identifying those being left behind, as well as limited technical and financial capacities.

This year's VNRs showed an enhanced role of local authorities. Many cities and communities have been conducting 'voluntary local reviews. Those are helping to spread awareness about the SDGs and monitor the implementation.

The fact that 47 countries carried out a VNR despite the impact of COVID 19 shows the high commitment to the 2030 Agenda. Countries spoke about the impact of the pandemic on their achievement of the SDGs and the preparations of VNRs. They presented their policies and strategies to respond to the pandemic, from health measures to policies addressing the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, including stimulus packages. Many also stressed the need for a coordinated approach by governments and all actors in society in responding to the pandemic.

Concrete, bold and implementable solutions are needed

The continuing commitment to the 2030 Agenda showed not only in the number of VNRs but also in the submission of multiple initiatives by governments and different stakeholders to advance the SDGs, called "SDG acceleration actions", in the lead up and during the HLPF. For instance, the City of Bogotá has launched a "District Care System", implemented through strategy of 'blocks of care' designed to deliver neighborhood care services. Mastercard has pledged to bring a total of 1 billion people and 50 million micro and small businesses into the digital economy by 2025. Through its "Green Recovery" initiative, Nigeria has committed to enhance biodiversity conservation, with the ambition of increasing the country's forest coverage from the current 5% to 25% of the national land cover by 2050. Hunger-free Villages - Tilonia COVID Relief of Barefoot College in India aims to ensure 216 villages and 9 slums are hunger-free in the midst of COVID-19 epidemic and lockdown. This is done by distributing survival kits and masks to 200,000 people including migrant laborers, daily wage workers and men and women without ration cards. More concrete, bold and implementable solutions inspired by the Sustainable Development Goals are needed.

More details are available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgactions>.

The negotiations on the HLPF Ministerial declaration for the 2020 HLPF are ongoing. They will be able to build on the rich discussions held at the HLPF and to provide political guidance for responding to COVID-19 while keeping the compass on accelerating the achievement of the SDGs.

The meeting was the first large virtual UN meeting. This did not diminish the breadth and depth of the debates and the number of participants. There was also the usual buzz around the HLPF, with about 200 [official side events](#), and [seventeen VNR Labs](#) to delve deeper into the VNRs. [Nine special events](#) provided platforms for different communities engaged around the 2030 Agenda such as local and regional governments, chief sustainability officers, higher education experts, volunteers and parliaments. These attracted over 6,000 participants. There were also [10 virtual exhibitions](#). The meeting attracted more than 72,000 live views.