



## A year into COVID-19 – how do we invest to recover better?

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What have we learned from the ravages of COVID-19, with a global economic standstill and millions of people left reeling in its wake? How do we repair broken systems that failed to prevent this crisis? The upcoming Financing for Development Forum will explore how to invest to recover better.

The latest [Financing for Sustainable Development Report \(FSDR\)](#), released by 60 international agencies on 25 March, also attempts to answer some of these questions and advise the international community on how to scale up financing to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The key takeaway is that the pandemic could result in a lost decade for development, unless we invest in a recovery that is inclusive of developing countries and vulnerable groups. Due to the crisis, about 120 million more people were thrown into extreme poverty; over 114 million jobs were wiped out—disproportionately among women and youth; and over 2.5 million people lost their lives. Many of the SDGs are seriously threatened, while two-thirds of COVID vaccines are going to a few wealthy countries with many of the rest trailing years behind.

It is going to take a lot of money to bring us back on track, especially in developing countries. But the good news is that the resources can be found, and it will make a difference if invested in our sustainable future. The FSDR recommends:

- 50-year loans at low interest rates to struggling countries.
- International support for nations at risk of debt distress.
- Rich countries meet their 0.7% Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitment.
- Capital markets investing the money where it is needed the most.
- Removing fossil fuel subsidies while applying carbon pricing.
- Eliminating illicit financial flows, which deprive governments of billions of dollars every year.
- Better taxation models, especially of the digital economy, to prevent tax avoidance.

The post-COVID recovery will not be easy but rebuilding better is not only possible by scaling up financing of the SDGs, it is vital. The upcoming [Financing for Development Forum](#) (12-15 April) and the [SDG Investment Fair](#) (13-14 April) will explore where and how to invest in a better future for all.



## EXPERT VOICES

### Can we feed the billions?



With hundreds of millions suffering hunger, a growing population and devastating impacts of agriculture on the environment, many experts are asking themselves: will we have enough food for everyone? Ahead of the [54th session of the UN Commission on Population Development](#), we ask that question to Cheryl Sawyer, Senior Population Affairs Officer at UN DESA.

**Whenever we hear of hunger, water shortages or climate change, many people are quick to point the finger at a growing human population. Are we really becoming too numerous to sustain ourselves?**

“Since the 1960s, global growth in agricultural production has outpaced population increase. However, this success has come at a high cost. First, today’s food systems are unsustainable and create tremendous food loss and waste. Second, the current distribution of food is highly unequal, as evidenced by the persistence of hunger and malnutrition. Third, our diets generate premature mortality and chronic disease.

Continued population growth will substantially increase the demand for food by 2050, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Population growth is certainly an important driver of increased food demand, but its impact is amplified by the changes in the types and quantities of food we consume.”

## Today, we are producing more than enough food to feed the world's entire population. Are we succeeding at that?

“The current food systems are failing people and the planet in myriad ways. After more than a decade of steady decline, the number of undernourished people in the world increased to almost 690 million, or 8.9 per cent of the global population, in 2019.

Moreover, seven per cent of children under five suffer from acute malnutrition, while nearly 40 per cent of adults are overweight. More than 3 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet. Unhealthy diets are now responsible for more adult deaths and disability worldwide than tobacco use.

Food production is a major driver of biodiversity loss and of air and water pollution. The impact of climate change on food production is especially felt in low- and middle-income countries, where many people depend on agriculture for their livelihoods.”

## Where does the UN Commission on Population and Development come in?

“For the first time in its history, the UN Commission on Population and Development will consider the issue of food security and nutrition within the context of population and sustainable development.

In particular, the Commission will assess how food and nutrition policies and programmes can promote sustainable production and consumption, maternal and newborn health, child nutrition, women empowerment and other priorities of the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The Commission is expected to make an important contribution to the upcoming Food Systems Summit.”

For more information, see: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/events/CPD54>

Cheryl Sawyer is also the lead author of the [Secretary-General's report on population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development](#)



## THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW



## Four things you need to know about youth and SDGs

Youth are a major force for sustainable development and key agents for social change, economic growth and technological innovation. From calling for urgent climate action to tackling inequalities and gender biases, young people are driving the Decade of Action

for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) forward. On 7-8 April, they will take the stage at the [UN ECOSOC Youth Forum](#).

### 1. Youth are champions of climate action



Young people play a key role in tackling climate change. They constitute the majority of the population in many countries and have an increasingly strong environmental awareness. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, young people took their climate activism online, voicing their belief that preserving our planet is a precondition for societies to progress and economies to thrive.

## 2. Youth are advocates for inclusive societies

Yearning for a world where opportunities are equally distributed, young people are taking action for peaceful, just and inclusive societies. They are contributing to an inclusive society during the COVID-19 as volunteers and healthcare workers, filling the gaps in their communities' health systems. Youth organizations bring the needs of the most vulnerable to the attention of decision-makers and run campaigns about COVID-19 prevention.

## 3. Youth fight hunger

The slowdown in economic activity during COVID-19 has pushed tens of millions into extreme poverty. Youth have stepped up and are contributing to their communities by engaging in agriculture and rural development, helping to eradicate hunger. Their work is not only vital for the sustainability of food systems, but it also helps to address youth unemployment, poverty and migration.

## 4. Youth for good health and wellbeing

Young people working in the health sector are helping their communities by speaking out for – and in some cases, providing – effective, equitable care and emergency health response. They also use their expertise and time to assist people with mental health issues, improve access to lifesaving testing, conduct scientific research and help develop adequate technology.

Every year, young leaders from around the world contribute to achieving the 2030 Agenda through sharing their collective ideas, solutions and innovations at [the ECOSOC Youth Forum](#), which is commemorating its 10th Anniversary this year.

Be a part of the ECOSOC Youth Forum 2021. Learn more [here](#).





## The cool solutions to Africa's burning problems

*By Adekoyejo Kuye, Project Lead, Manamuz Electric LTD*

One third of the food produced globally for human consumption never gets to the final consumer, estimates the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO). In Africa, the numbers are even more alarming, an average of 50 per cent of what is produced in African countries is wasted – an amount that [could feed 300 million people](#). This is mainly caused by the huge energy gap and the inefficient supply chain infrastructure within the agricultural sector.

In most African countries, agriculture employs an average of 54 per cent of the working population. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, more than 60 per cent of the population are smallholder farmers. If we can innovate for smallholder farmers to drive a sustainable and robust agricultural sector, it will fast-track the development of Africa as a whole.

Innovation may not necessarily mean new inventions or technologies, but it could be combining different existing clean technologies and sustainable business models. Smallholder farmers are the backbone of national and regional food systems on the African continent. With the right technology, they can ensure food availability for themselves and their regions.

**Problems:** One of the major problems we are facing in the agricultural sector is the lack of sustainable cold chain infrastructure. The majority of farmers are located in rural communities that have little or no access to electricity to power cold chains. Making use of conventional cold chain facilities is inefficient, unreliable, and far more expensive because they depend largely on fossil fuels with exorbitant operational costs.

At a time when we are aiming to decarbonize the energy sector to prevent further climate degradation, fossil fuel-powered cooling solutions are not an option for a sustainable future in agriculture.

To build a sustainable cold chain infrastructure, we need to close the energy gap in the agricultural sector by creating a nexus between the renewable energy industry and the agricultural sector.

With sustainable cold chain infrastructure, farm produce can have its shelf life increased from a few hours to several weeks or months. In sub-Saharan Africa, only 3 per cent of the total agricultural output is refrigerated at the first mile. About half of what is produced is wasted and largely undervalued, this is what keeps farmers and agribusinesses poor.

Another problem is the lack of an efficient supply chain. There is a need to digitize the supply chain of perishable foods to make it more efficient as this shortens the time it takes for harvested produce to get to the final consumer.

**Solution:** Sustainable cold chain infrastructure and an efficient supply chain network powered by clean and affordable technology are required by grass-root farmers and vendors to solve the problem of food waste. There is also a need for hygienic and sustainable food logistics infrastructure that digital platforms can build upon.

Solving the problem of post-harvest losses will:

- Reduce food waste emissions (SDG 13): according to the FAO, Global food waste generates 4 Gigatonnes of greenhouse gas emissions annually. This is almost as much as all the emission from road transport globally.
- Reduce poverty and hunger (SDG 1, 2): more jobs will be created, especially for women. Eliminating food loss will also drive agricultural production and food availability.
- Ensure access to affordable, sustainable, and clean energy (SDG 7): powering cold chains with modern energy will reduce operational cost, increase profitability and ensure cold chain facilities are more accessible to farmers.
- Increase industry innovation and infrastructure in the agricultural sector. (SDG 9)
- Ensure sustainable production and consumption pattern. (SDG 12)

At Manamuz Electric, we have come up with the invention of sustainable cold chain solutions and transport systems that are completely powered by solar energy. We have designed a sustainable and efficient refrigeration system that is optimized for the African perishable agricultural supply chain. We call it the Coldbox Store.

It is an integrated cold chain that boosts the resilience of the perishable food supply chain. In addition, it directly links farmers to vendors and consumers thereby shortening food supply chains. This is possible because it provides third-party cold chain logistics infrastructure for farmers, market sellers, e-commerce platforms, and exporters.

Presently, we have deployed our first Coldbox Store at a fruit and vegetable market in Enugu State, Nigeria and locals are already seeing significant positive impacts. With series-A funding, we plan to set up a manufacturing plant in Nigeria to mass-produce these solutions and make them readily available.

We are already taking steps to bring about sustainable agriculture in Nigeria and Africa at large, we urge the rest of the world, especially young people all over to start innovating for smallholder farmers to end post-harvest losses and food spoilage. Sustainable agriculture will revive the economies of most African countries and help in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We all need to act in this decade of action. We have what it takes to bring about change, all we need to do is take action.

*\* The views expressed in this blog are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of UN DESA.*



# SDG 7 IN NUMBERS



**AFFORDABLE AND RELIABLE ENERGY**  
IS CRITICAL FOR HEALTH FACILITIES



**1 IN 4 NOT ELECTRIFIED**  
IN SOME DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (2018)



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