



New global dialogue series to help navigate options to recover better

Life as we know it has been turned upside down. Societies have been virus-stricken, with hundreds of thousands losing their lives. Health care systems are under pressure, the global economy is in decline and vulnerable groups are seriously affected. The ravage of COVID-19 is extensive. To help the world navigate towards a sustainable recovery, UN DESA's experts have closely monitored the situation and shared policy recommendations. These will now be shared globally through a series of online dialogue events.

Throughout the crisis, to support the Secretary-General's effort and initiatives, UN DESA has generated timely analytical work and the policy advice through a series of policy briefs. Policymakers have been able to learn about the impacts of the virus on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the global economy and on particular groups of society. To highlight the findings of these policy briefs and other reports, UN DESA has just launched a new 'Global Online Dialogue Series'.

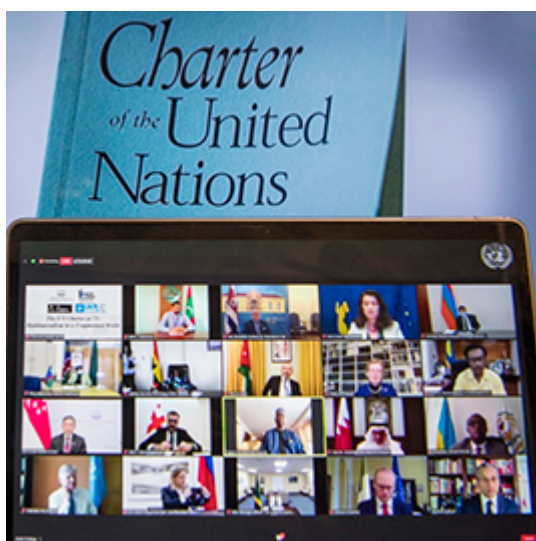
The series kicked off in July, after the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, with the launch of a new volume, "Recover Better: Economic and Social Challenges and Opportunities," from the High-level Advisory Board on Economic and Social Affairs (HLAB).

The upcoming session in September will focus on youth. The event, "Navigating uncertainties: An intergenerational dialogue on the impact of COVID-19 on youth employment," offers young people an opportunity to discuss the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic during a period of their lives when many things are already in flux. Members of older generations will also share their experiences of making the school-to-work transition.

The discussions will draw from the 2020 UN World Youth Report, the Secretary-General's recent policy brief "Education during COVID-19 and beyond," and the work of the HLAB. Online participants are welcome to share questions during the event and ahead of time on social media. The results of this dialogue—and future sessions on digital governance, climate action and demographic change—will inform UN DESA's future policy briefs on the economic and social effects of the pandemic.

All sessions in the online dialogue series will be open to the public. Information about future events and registration will be available on UN DESA's website.

HIGHLIGHTS



International cooperation works – even from home

For the past 75 years, royals, presidents, prime ministers and other world leaders have been coming together at the UN General Assembly every year to discuss and attempt to peacefully resolve the planet's gravest challenges. This year, for the first time since the end of the Second World War, they will stay at home. But the conversation and cooperation carry on.

With the COVID-19 pandemic raging on in many parts of the world, including in the UN's host nation, the United States, the General Debate of the General Assembly this month will, for the first time in history, move to the virtual reality.

Although virtual meetings are a far cry from real-life, human interaction, international cooperation is more important than ever, as the world grapples with a global pandemic, a collapsing economy, catastrophic climate change and a human crisis that threatens to push millions into poverty.

United Nations turns 75

On 21 September the world will be reminded of the value of multilateralism, as the United Nations celebrates its historic 75th anniversary, reflecting on all that humanity has achieved together, and all that is still left to do. "We, the peoples" will also recommit to the vision of the UN Charter, which is more relevant today than ever before.

SDG Action continues

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic wiping out years of progress, the world remains resolute to deliver the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Every year between now and 2030, world leaders at the General Assembly will be joining the "SDG moment," an annual check-in to instil a renewed sense of urgency, ambition and accountability into our collective efforts.

But States alone will not be able to achieve the ambitious 2030 Agenda. To support them, UN DESA will invite private sector leaders for the annual SDG Business Forum, to be held virtually on 23 September, in cooperation with the UN Global Compact and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). The Forum will spark a meaningful dialogue

on the role of the private sector in addressing the current economic landscape and to co-create lasting solutions for a more sustainable future.

A range of other high-level events, including the Biodiversity Summit, and a meeting to commemorate the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons will punctuate the busy September week for the General Assembly.

HIGHLIGHTS



Making the case for sustainable business solutions

This year is like no other, for individuals and businesses alike. The world is facing new and unforeseen challenges at a time when the international community is five years into efforts to achieve the global goals and at the start of the Decade of Action. As companies struggle in a COVID-19 stricken world, some suggest that the gloomy economic forecast may make them less inclined to adopt sustainable business practices. The upcoming SDG Business Forum hopes

to prove otherwise.

Contrary to some of the fears, the global community has seen a new form of business leadership take shape during the crisis – a generation of executives and rising professionals who understand that there are no successful businesses in a failing world.

The private sector – in partnership with governments and civil society leaders – is therefore leveraging the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to respond to the immediate threats in their communities. They are preparing for long term sustainability, by remedying three critical fragilities: climate change and biodiversity loss; social inequality; and economic exclusion.

As the largest UN gathering of business leaders, the SDG Business Forum – co-hosted by UN DESA, the UN Global Compact and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) – highlights how companies are using their influence to create positive change locally and globally.

The 2020 edition of the Forum, held virtually on 23 September on the margins of the 75th UN General Assembly (UNGA), will continue to serve as a platform for dialogue on the role of the private sector in addressing the current economic landscape and to co-create sustainable solutions.

The Forum will be hosted on the third day of the UNGA special event 'Uniting Business Live'. Registration is complimentary to UN Global Compact participants, signatory companies and non-business stakeholders, ICC participant companies and non-business stakeholders, as well as UN System employees, representatives from Major Groups and other stakeholders. To register, visit this [site](#).

To spur further action on the goals, this year's event aims to generate a Compendium of SDG Acceleration Actions for the Decade of Action and Delivery from its participants. Participants are also encouraged to register their SDG Acceleration Action initiatives [here](#).

GET INVOLVED



A Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs

With the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to impact lives and livelihoods, a health crisis has quickly become a human and socio-economic crisis, impeding progress towards achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), whilst also making their achievement even more urgent and necessary.

There are only 10 years left to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That's why world leaders, at the SDG Summit in September 2019,

called for a Decade of Action, pledging to mobilize financing, enhance national implementation and strengthen institutions to achieve the Goals by the target date of 2030.

Accelerated efforts are needed to boost sustainable solutions to the biggest challenges we face. The Decade of Action asks for transformative economic, social and environmental solutions. We will need inspiration and creativity at global, local and individual levels – from national and local governments, civil society, the private sector, academia and youth. A transformative recovery from COVID-19 should reduce the risk of future crises and re-launch the Decade of Action.

People gets involved to support the global goals

Nations, organizations and people from all the corners of the world are working together to address the present and future challenges from different areas, for a better future for humanity. To collect and share information about inspiring actions being taken to push the needle on the SDGs around the world, UN DESA has developed an online "SDG Accelerations Actions" database that currently includes over 200 initiatives by governments and stakeholders alike. The Government of Egypt is launching the new phase of its housing plan for all, which has received a EGP 10 billion investment to alleviate housing inequality and provide decent housing for slum dwellers and curb the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic. The University of South Africa will offer Master's Degree in Sustainable Development from 2022, aligned with the 2030 and 2063 Agendas, and aims to award degrees to 50 graduates by 2023. UNDP Colombia is supporting the national government to improve ecosystem connectivity and biodiversity conservation of 60,000-80,000 hectares of productive landscapes in Amazon region, benefitting the livelihoods of 4000 people by 2024.

Take part in the Decade of Action!

Don't be left behind. Join our community in supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Developments. Share your story of sustainability on social media using #SDGs and #GlobalGoals and register your SDG Acceleration Actions on SDG implementation! You can also follow the monthly SDG calendar to promote your own Goal-related material and be inspired by the editorial package provided by the UN Department of Global Communications every month.



Prosperity or planet – do we really have to choose?

We have all seen it: Venetian canals teeming with fish, once polluted megacities under clear blue skies, wild animals roaming empty boulevards. The COVID-19 crisis laid bare that human prosperity and well-being still come largely at the expense of our planet's health. But UN DESA's latest Sustainable Development Outlook report found that we have a chance to change all that. We talked to its lead author,

Nazrul Islam.

COVID-19 has set us back decades on some of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Is achieving these goals still realistic?

“COVID-19 has made achievement of SDGs more difficult, but it has not made them unachievable. The Decade of Action launched earlier this year to re-energize and accelerate progress toward the SDGs has barely started. We can still achieve a lot over the next nine years. So, it is still possible to achieve the SDGs if there are the necessary determination and commensurate efforts.”

As countries spend trillions to kickstart their economies that ground to a halt during the pandemic, where should they place their focus?

“The focus should be on protecting a basic level of income and consumption for the vast majority of the population. Poverty must not increase and hunger must not rise. Research has shown that economic growth measured in terms of aggregate GDP increase is not the only determinant of these twin objectives. Distribution is also important. A more equitable sharing of employment and income can help in achieving the SDGs.”

Is it possible to restart the global economy and bring back the lost jobs without destroying the environment and our climate in the process?

“It is possible but will require considerable reprioritization, revaluation, and recasting. For example, the current measure of aggregate output values many activities that are destructive for the environment and accelerate climate change. On the other hand, many activities that nurture human lives and protect environment are not valued or at least not valued enough. Reprioritization, revaluation, and recasting can help in mitigating the current opposition between SDGs related to prosperity and those related to planet — an opposition that COVID-19 has brought to fore more starkly. Much depends on the extent to which the world community will take notice of this opposition and the profound character of its revelation and the lessons that emerge from it.”



Paying tribute to the resilience of indigenous peoples

Around the world, there are approximately 476 million indigenous peoples. Their culture of cooperation and trust has prepared them to confront the COVID-19 pandemic in a resilient manner. On 10 August, representatives of indigenous peoples, governments and the UN system came together to pay tribute to their resilience in a virtual event to commemorate the International Day of

the World's Indigenous Peoples.

“Indigenous peoples are crucial partners in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Mr. Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General of UN-DESA, in his opening remarks. “We must work with indigenous peoples and their communities to build resilience to the health and socio-economic effects of the pandemic”.

During the event held under the theme “COVID-19 and Indigenous Peoples’ resilience” Ms. Chandra Roy-Henriksen, Chief of the Indigenous Peoples and Development Branch/Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in UN DESA, led a panel discussion, where speakers from diverse indigenous regions highlighted the impact the pandemic has had on communities and shared solutions.

As highlighted by the speakers, among the challenges indigenous peoples face is a lack of adequate health facilities; an already-existing digital divide, further disrupting education during the pandemic; loss of income and livelihoods; paucity of disaggregated data; lack of safe drinking water; and continued incursions on indigenous lands and territories without consent.

Contrasting these hardships, speakers also shared some inspiring practices. Mr. Gam Shimray, Secretary General of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, described “creative methods” including the food exchange system set up between northern rural and southern urban Thailand.

Ms. Danielle Bourque-Bearskin, a Public Health Nurse with Indigenous Services Canada, described how indigenous peoples had “responded excellently by taking a very strong approach to quarantine the community”.

Elsewhere, technology has been deployed to provide health information in indigenous languages, including videos targeting indigenous elders. The Sami people in Finland, for example, have mobilized social media to spread accurate information regarding preventative measures.

The inspiring practices shared during the virtual event demonstrated how indigenous peoples continue to counter hazards with resilience and resolve. As noted by Basiru Issa, from the Network of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in Central Africa, “indigenous peoples can contribute in the fight against COVID-19 through their traditional knowledge”, and provide inspiration for resilience for all.

Watch a recording of the event on the Facebook page of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues [here](#).

For more information: International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

MORE FROM UNDESA

A healthy and green recovery: the future we want

SDG BLOG



Poorvaprabha Patil, President,
Medical Students Association of India,
Sophie Gepp, Health for Future



By Poorvaprabha Patil, President of the Medical Students Association of India, and Sophie Gepp, Health for Future

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the worst health crisis since the Spanish Flu of 1918. With over 844,000 deaths, as of 30th August 2020, and slowing economies due to strict quarantine measures, human lives have been disrupted in more ways than one. On the flip side, the pandemic has brought out in bright light the failures of our existing systems and misplaced priorities of many governments across the world. While we head to a “new normal” after the pandemic, we have the opportunity to ask ourselves which direction our pre-pandemic “normal” was driving us in. And find a “new normal” that not only internalizes the ideals of the SDGs and leaving no one behind, but also responds to the next imminent threat that the world faces- climate change.

There are lessons from COVID-19 for the climate crisis that we cannot overlook. We learned how we need to act in solidarity, between generations, across borders and differences. We learned that we are capable of acting and adapting in the face of a crisis. We learned the importance of science and timely action and the need for prevention. And we learned that human health and the state of the ecosystems we live in are inextricably linked. These are the lessons we should not, must not forget for the other, imminent crisis we are facing: the climate crisis.

In his [press conference on 21st August 2020](#), the head of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called the recovery from COVID-19 a “once-in-a-century opportunity to shape the world our children will inherit”. But make no mistake: with regards to the climate crisis, it is not only a once-in-a-century opportunity, it is likely our last shot. With that urgency in mind, it is now our time to collectively reimagine what we want the post-COVID world to look like. Many voices have called for “building back better”. WHO has released a [manifesto](#), with “prescriptions for a healthy and green recovery from COVID-19”. After clapping for health workers all over the world, now it is time to listen to what health professionals worldwide are demanding for a healthier future.

Many solutions already exist, with benefits to both – human health and the climate. Phasing out fossil fuels protects the climate and reduces the negative health effects of air pollution. Reducing car traffic in cities and increasing cycling or walking reduces air pollution, noise and road-traffic accidents, and provides health benefits through physical activity. If we put together our efforts and all our investments towards building a healthy, green future, imagine what the “new normal” could look like!

As young people who will live through the consequences of the climate crisis if it's not averted, we imagine a post-COVID world that's equipped to face these challenges. A future with the SDGs, sustainability and climate action at the centre, with priorities that serve all of humankind and not just a subset, is the only possible future we have.

To actualize a future like that, we need to:

1. Listen to science and act. Now.

It's not the dearth of scientific data that keeps us from moving in the right direction, but the lack of action. Even before COVID-19, scientists warned about the pandemic potential of zoonotic diseases and the increased risk due to destruction of habitat and biodiversity loss – we just weren't listening. Furthermore, we witnessed blatant disregard for scientific facts and evidence in some parts of the world, and the aftermath of those actions. The climate crisis isn't unannounced. We do not have the time to debate over climate change being “real” or not, or the space for empty promises. We and our governments need to act now, in the direction of science. And we, as citizens, need to hold them accountable.

2. Identify vulnerabilities and reduce inequalities

Climate change is the 21st century's biggest threat to global health, and human life at large. Like COVID-19, it will – and has started to – impact the most vulnerable. The fabric of a healthy and safe society can only be weaved by equitable solutions, and policies that address these vulnerabilities, especially in times of crisis. As leaders of today and the future, the world we strive to create is one where we realize the true essence of leaving no one behind, using the blueprint that the SDGs provide us.

3. Understand that the SDGs aren't optional

While some countries have made progress on “some SDGs” that are most convenient to their agendas, we are far from realizing them. With the opportunity of a green, healthy recovery out of a world gripped by COVID 19, comes the opportunity – and obligation – to truly start realizing the importance and interlinkages between all 17 SDGs for a safe and healthy world capable of averting the climate crisis. There is no space to treat the SDGs like a list of 17 “options” to choose from.

4. Act together

Global crises need global responses. Not only do we need to act beyond borders, we also need to act beyond age, race, colour, caste, nationality, political affiliations, sexuality, gender orientation and other differences. Climate change will impact us all.

Intergenerational leadership is the key to a sustainable future. Just like flattening the curve included all generations, and many young people stayed home and away from beloved ones to protect them, we now need all generations to come together to protect our future.

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

17 goals in numbers



SDGs IN NUMBERS

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, progress towards the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) had been uneven. Indeed, accelerated actions were needed in most areas. Nonetheless, gains were being made in a number of areas:

- The global maternal mortality ratio had declined by 38 percent and the under-5 mortality rate had fallen by almost 50 percent since 2000.
- Over 1 billion people had gained access to electricity between 2010 and 2018.
- In 2019, almost the entire world population (97 per cent) lived within reach of a mobile cellular signal, and 93 per cent lived within reach of a mobile-broadband signal.
- Countries were developing national policies to support sustainable development and signing international environmental protection agreements. However, progress had either stalled or been reversed in other areas:

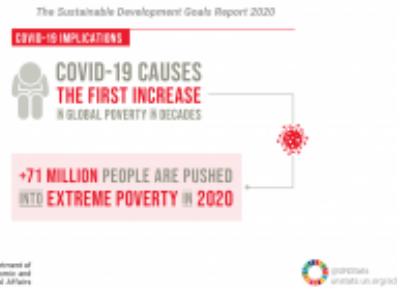


However, progress had either stalled or been reversed in other areas:

- The number of persons suffering from hunger and food insecurity was on the rise. Almost 690 million people were undernourished, and 2 billion people were affected by moderate or severe food insecurity in 2019.
- Climate change was occurring much more quickly than anticipated. The year 2019 was the second warmest on record and the end of the warmest decade of 2010 to 2019.
- And inequality continued to increase within and among countries. Young workers were twice as likely to live in extreme poverty than adult workers and 85 per cent people without access to electricity lived in rural areas.

COVID-19 is derailing the efforts on the implementations of the SDGs and threatening the achievements already made in many areas.

- COVID-19 is expected to push 71 million people back into extreme poverty and cause 132 million more people to suffer from undernourishment in 2020.
- Illness and deaths from communicable diseases will spike. For example, service cancellations would lead to a 100 per cent increase in malaria deaths in sub-Saharan Africa.
- School closures have kept up to 90 per cent of all students out of school, reversing years of progress on education and remote learning remains out of reach for at least 500 million students.
- The world is also facing the worst economic recession since the Great Depression with GDP per capita expected to decline by 4.2 per cent in 2020.
- COVID-19 could cause the equivalent of 400 million job losses globally in the second quarter of 2020.
- While vulnerable groups are being hit hardest by the pandemic including older persons, persons with disabilities, children, women and migrants and refugees. For example, in some countries, violence against women and girls has increased by 30 per cent during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns.



Access more data and information on the indicators for all the SDGs in the [SDG Progress Report 2020](#).

Amid a global collapse, regional trade may be the best way forward



It no longer surprises us to find products from the farthest corners of the world in our local grocery stores or to visit these same corners as tourists. International trade gives consumers and countries the opportunity to access goods and services either entirely unavailable domestically or only at a higher cost. It is an essential part of countries' economic activity. For many developing countries, it is also a path to economic development.

But this path has now become more challenging as the COVID-19 pandemic slashes global trade by magnitudes surpassing even those seen during the 2008 global financial crisis. Tourism, considered part of trade in services, is experiencing an unprecedented collapse. Trade in developing countries has dropped sharply. Exports have decreased due to lower demand in destination markets, while currency depreciation, shortage of foreign currency and concerns over rising debt have contributed to lower imports.

While projections point to a limited recovery in 2021, the global trade environment will remain highly uncertain for the next few years. Trade growth had already been slowing down for about a decade before the pandemic. Last year, trade volumes contracted for the first time since the global financial crisis, both globally and in developing countries. Systemic issues, such as subdued demand and protectionist policies, have weakened trade activity.

The persistent headwinds to global trade have important economic implications. Investment and innovation may be affected as firms consider these jointly with trade participation. This, in turn, may constrain productivity growth.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also led many firms to rethink production processes and the configuration of global value chains. At the same time, initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement illustrate how developing countries have already embarked on strengthening regional trade ties. Regional integration can help shield economies from global economic volatility, decrease supply disruptions, for example of medical equipment, and diversify exports. Amidst slowing global trade, a recalibration towards more regional trade may be the best way forward for many developing economies.

Get more details in the [September Monthly Briefing on the World Economic Situation and Prospects](#) published on 1 September.

From local to global – youth take action



“Young people are usually the first responders, and have always been on the frontlines,” said Lynrose Jane Genon, member of Young Women Leaders for Peace in the Philippines, in the podcast “From local to global – youth taking action”, released on International Youth Day on 12 August. “When young people are involved, the response to solving local and global challenges is more holistic, it is more effective, and it is more resisting,” she added.

In the year the United Nations turns 75, and with only 10 years remaining to make the 2030 Agenda a reality, the international day was celebrated under the theme “Youth Engagement for Global Action”.

In partnership with the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD) Youth Caucus and Create2030, UN DESA produced a 3-part podcast discussion to commemorate the day. This lively chat drew on the experiences of young people, providing valuable lessons on how youth representation and participation in politics can be enhanced when responding to challenges at the local, national and global levels.

The challenges humanity faces, including the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, call for concerted global action and the meaningful engagement of young people to find effective solutions. Yet, youth are still conspicuously missing from parliamentary representation. A third of countries do not allow persons under 25 to run for parliament, leaving youth disenchanted with politics and distanced from the decision-making processes that directly effect their lives and communities.

Participants in the 2020 International Youth Day celebrated the contribution young people can make in multilateral and national processes. To harness this, the event also called for the inclusion and participation of young people in policymaking to foster more inclusive and sustainable policies and restore trust in public institutions.

In addition, a large number of UN entities, Member States and youth organizations celebrated the day with independently organized events recognizing the importance of youth participation in all parts of society.

For more information: [International Youth Day](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

As a preventive measure amidst the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, some of the high-level meetings organized by UN DESA worldwide have been postponed, cancelled or are taking place virtually in a scaled down format. Others are still being reviewed. Find out the latest information about the affected events: [UN DESA Calendar](#): [UN DESA Calendar](#).

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