



**United
Nations**

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

**Executive Training for Policymakers on the 2030 Agenda
for Sustainable Development
22-26 March 2021**

Opening Remarks

**Mr. Alexander Trepelkov, Officer-in-Charge, Division for Sustainable
Development Goals, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

**Delivered by Amson Sibanda, Chief of National Strategies and Capacity
Building Branch, Division for Sustainable Development Goals**

22 March 2021

Distinguished participants,
Dear colleagues and friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, I am pleased to welcome you virtually to the *Executive Training for Policymakers on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

Allow me to thank Mr. Chun Kyoo Park, Head of the UN Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) —our Project Office in Incheon City in the Republic of Korea, for organizing and convening the sixth edition of this important event.

I had the opportunity to open and also participate as a speaker in the previous edition of this training course in May 2019, where sixty or so policymakers from around the world gathered in Incheon over 5 days to learn from lectures, group exercises and discussions on the implementation and review of progress on the SDGs.

I am delighted to note that while we cannot meet in person this time due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so many participants registered for the training course, which has to take place in a virtual format this year. Not only does it clearly reveal a real interest in such training, but it also shows your firm commitment towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

[COVID-19 Impact on SDGs]

Distinguished participants,

The COVID-19 pandemic has confronted the world with unprecedented socio-economic challenges, impacting health and food systems, jobs and livelihoods and the world economy by disrupting movement of people, economic activities and production and supply networks.

Confirmed cases of COVID-19 have now reached over 120 million globally and the pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human life, claiming at least 2.7 million lives worldwide.¹

According to the *World Economic Situation and Prospects* (WESP) report released by UN DESA in January 2021, the global economy contracted by 4.3 per cent last year, that is, 2.5 times the contraction of the global output during the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-2009.

The WESP 2021 also reports that COVID-19-related lockdown measures have affected around 2.7 billion workers around the world —particularly women and girls, who already bear a large share of the precarious and low-paid work in the labour-intensive service sectors and informal economy, are even more vulnerable and exposed to poverty, precariousness and increasing violence.

The pandemic has derailed progress on SDG 1 on eradicating poverty in all its forms everywhere and SDG 10 on inequalities, as it exposed and exacerbated poverty and inequalities within and among nations.

In fact, the COVID-19 crisis is having a devastating impact on all the 17 Goals and is threatening to stall them and even reverse the gains on the achievements of the SDGs that had been made before the pandemic hit.

The world was off track in achieving the SDGs by 2030, even before the COVID-19 crisis erupted. However, we can get back on course if countries and their development partners increase investment in quality education and health care, social protection, digital connectivity, and public services such as water and

¹ [COVID-19 Map - Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center \(jhu.edu\)](#)

sanitation, as well as addressing challenges like climate change and resilience building. These are all areas where improved governance mechanisms, policy coherence and coordination between national and subnational governments play a critical role.

The COVID-19 crisis has undeniably shifted the attention from the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs.

However, the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs are our roadmap, which offer the necessary integrated perspective and systemic and integrated framework to understand and address crises such as the one we live now through different yet interrelated economic, social and environmental lenses simultaneously.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As expressed in a recent report by the Committee for Development Policy, a subsidiary body of the UN Economic and Social Council, the COVID-19 crisis revealed the urgency for all developing and developed countries to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Developments patterns that were in place prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the Committee added, should no longer be sought in our path to sustainable recovery.

Efforts for recovery, the Committee stressed, should rather be oriented towards equality, resilience, and environmental sustainability as well as a new form of multilateralism, which would have learned from the shortcomings in responding to the COVID-19 crisis.

The Committee also called for the strengthening of the country-led and country-driven Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), which are regularly presented during the High-level Political Forum (HLPF).

It particularly called for a stronger focus on the transformative aspects of the 2030 Agenda, and for stronger emphasis to be put on the review process behind the VNR reports, which is meant to help identify the gaps and challenges and make necessary improvements for advancing SDG implementation.²

Such call for urgent action was already found in the Global Sustainable Development Report 2019 ([GSDR 2019](#)), which identified six entry points for

² <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/CDP-2021-33.pdf>

transformation and four levers to accelerate the transformations urgently needed to advance delivery of the 2030 Agenda.³

This call for urgent action was further echoed during the UN Secretary-General's SDG Summit held in September 2019, where Heads of State agreed on the Political Declaration⁴ for the coming Decade of Action, following the UN Secretary-General's global call to all sectors of society to mobilize for a decade of action to deliver the SDGs by 2030.⁵

The Political Declaration also called for the strengthening of the High-level Political Forum, including the Voluntary National Reviews, which play a central role not only in the follow-up and review of progress on the SDGs, but also as a catalyst for profound transformations and engage all segments of society towards the achievement of the SDGs.

[HLPF 2021]

The focus of the ninth session of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development has been placed on sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, addressing the three —economic, social and environmental— dimensions of sustainable development.

The Sustainable Development Goals that will be under review during the HLPF this year are Goals 1 on no poverty, 2 on zero hunger, 3 on good health and well-being, 8 on decent work and economic growth, 10 on reduced inequalities, 12 on responsible consumption and production, 13 on climate action, 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17 on partnerships in depth, most of them being intimately related to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis.⁶

This year's HLPF is particularly interesting as among the 42 countries who will present their VNR reports, 24 will be presenting for a second time while 8 will

³ These six entry points are: Human well-being and capabilities; Sustainable and just economies; Food systems and nutrition patterns; Energy decarbonization and universal access; Urban and peri-urban development; Global environmental commons. The four levers are: Governance; Economy and finance; Individual and collective Behaviour; and Science and technology.

⁴ <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/74/4>

⁵ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/decade-of-action/>

⁶ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2021>

be presenting for the third time. It will also be very interesting to hear the experience of the 10 countries who will present their VNRs for the first time.

We are expecting that the VNRs this year will reveal very innovative policies that can be supportive for accelerating recovery, building resilience and putting the world on the right trajectory to achieve the SDGs within the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

[Experience Sharing, Acceleration Action and SDG Good Practices]

Distinguished participants,

Sharing our experiences will help us become more resilient to future crisis and shocks.

To support this, DESA has created a number of online tools and platforms, for governments and other stakeholders to share their examples of SDG implementation with each other.

These include the SDG Acceleration Actions online database, which was set up to capture voluntary initiatives by governments and other actors to accelerate SDG implementation.

It is interesting to note that out of the 221 SDG Acceleration Actions that have been published online to date, 32 per cent are from Governments and 35 per cent are from the civil society. The private sector is also involved with 9.5 per cent of the SDG Acceleration Actions, while the Academia is involved at 5 per cent.

I encourage all the participants of this Training Course to promote the UN DESA SDG Acceleration Actions online database among your governments and institutions so you can join the ranks and showcase some of your best acceleration actions on this platform.

[Closing]

Distinguished participants,

The 2020-21 Executive Training Course for Policymakers on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will explore a set of 5 themes selected from the SDGs that will go under in-depth review during the 2021 HLPF, namely, Goals

1 on no poverty, 2 on zero hunger, 3 on good health and well-being, 8 on decent work and economic growth, 12 on responsible consumption and production, 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17 on partnerships.

It is a very ambitious programme to unfold over the next 5 days, given the virtual format of the Course due to the travel and in-person meeting restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, looking at the programme, with the themes to be explored, the presentations and discussions that will follow throughout the week I trust that this Training Course will be successful in helping you all to better contribute to the SDG implementation, localization and reviews of progress on SDGs in your countries so with your help, we can achieve the 2030 Agenda by 2030.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last October, as the United Nations celebrated its 75th anniversary, over a million people took part in a global consultation, where 60 per cent of the respondents affirmed that the UN has made the world a better place, and 74 per cent of them recognized the UN as “essential” to tackle global challenges in the future.

However, the United Nations cannot fulfil such an important role alone.

In this Decade of Action, and in the spirit of a reinvigorated multilateralism that is inclusive, networked and effective, let us join forces globally, regionally and locally, with all partners and stakeholders, so that we can achieve the 2030 Agenda, that is our shared vision for a future that is more equal, inclusive, sustainable and safe for all.

Thank you.
