



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
INCHEON, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

CONCEPT NOTE & AGENDA

2020-21 Sustainable Development Transformation Forum

Building Back Better and Greener — Sustainable, Low-Carbon Industrialisation

22 - 26 February 2021

8:00pm (Republic of Korea), 12:00pm (Geneva), 6:00am (New York)

Background

Established in 2011, the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) is part of the Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). UNOSD contributes to building, exchanging and facilitating the use of knowledge in support of sustainable development.

One of UNOSD's flagship activities to fulfil this goal is the annual Sustainable Development Transformation Forum (SDTF), which normally takes place at the end of October every year but, due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the 2020 SDTF had to be postponed to early 2021. In previous editions of the SDTF, the Forum tended to follow the thread of the previous and forthcoming sessions of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), and examine their interlinkages, given the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda. It moved away from this approach for the 2019 SDTF, when the Forum instead followed the structure of the Global Sustainable Development Report 2019 (GSDR 2019)¹ using its six identified entry points for transformation and four levers which, when combined effectively, can accelerate those transformations².

This edition of the SDTF will also be guided by the 2019 GSDR approach, particularly the four key levers of change to accelerate fundamental transformation towards sustainable development (Governance, Economy and Finance, Individual and Collective Action, and Science and Technology), while focusing on some of the unprecedented challenges the international community is facing due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Forum will discuss experiences, lessons learned, good practices, strategies and measures that have been or could be implemented to build back better and greener, using the Sustainable Development Goals as a roadmap for all sectors of society at all levels to work towards a rapid and

¹ In 2016, the UN Member States requested the Secretary General to appoint a group of independent scientists to prepare a Global Sustainable Development Report every four years, to inform deliberations at the High-Level Political Forum on implementation of the 2030 Agenda and on emerging sustainable development challenges. The first edition of this report was published in September 2019 under the title, "The Future is Now: Science for Achieving Sustainable Development".

² 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.

sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and accelerate the delivery of the Global Goals during this Decade of Action³.

The COVID-19 pandemic has confronted the world with unprecedented challenges, exposing and exacerbating inequalities, weaknesses in health systems, governance challenges following on years of weakening delivery of public goods, lack of policy coherence and lack of coordination between national, regional and local governments, as well as public sector departments and agencies. Today, the pandemic continues to spread rapidly in parts of the world, even as vaccines begin to be distributed in a number of countries. The economic toll has been high, even in countries which have been so far spared the worst health impacts. Moreover, there is a serious risk that the rollout of vaccines in less developed countries will be delayed as the global supply is straining to meet demand even in the rich countries, which have signed contracts for large quantities of the vaccines so far approved in Europe and North America. If the pandemic continues to spread widely in those countries, their economies will struggle to recover and progress towards many SDGs will be set back by years⁴. While certain countries' governments have the fiscal space to provide income support to households and relief for businesses in distress, this is rarely true for the less developed countries, many of whom entered this COVID crisis already substantially in debt. The G20 countries have spent roughly 22 percent of their GDP for stimulus funding, while sub-Saharan African countries have spent on average just 3 percent of their much smaller GDPs⁵.

The UN and other international organisations are spearheading a collaborative multilateral effort to address the immediate health crisis by working to ensure that vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics are available and affordable to those in need in a timely manner, whatever the country. Still, the vaccine effort, under the auspices of COVAX, must contend with the supply shortages mentioned above.

Meanwhile, the UN and other multilateral institutions are also co-ordinating efforts to mobilise resources for countries, especially less developed ones, to build back better and greener – that is, to recover from the economic shock as quickly as possible and in doing so to direct investments to uses that will put them on a long-term sustainable and resilient development path – one consistent with achieving the SDGs as well as the Paris Agreement targets.

Forum Objectives and Content

The overarching objective of the 2020-21 SDTF is to achieve a better understanding of successes, lessons and specific mechanisms for initiating and fostering the transformations that are urgently needed to make our societies sustainable, resilient, prosperous, peaceful and inclusive in accordance with the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This edition's focus will be on building back better and greener through fostering sustainable, low-carbon industrialisation. It will identify efforts being made by governments and the opportunities they can exploit to use COVID-19 recovery plans and budgets to

³ In September 2019, during the UN Secretary-General's SDG Summit, Heads of State agreed on a Political Declaration ([A/RES/74/4](#)) 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. (Source: [Decade of Action to deliver the Global Goals](#)).

⁴ The IMF projects that, even with the US\$18 trillion that has already been spent to stimulate economies around the world, the global economy will lose US\$12 trillion, or more, by the end of 2021. (Source: [Goalkeepers Report 2020](#)).

⁵ Idem.

support a low-carbon transition across the economy, with a strong emphasis on decarbonisation of the energy, transport and industrial (including agro-industry) sectors.

Unlike the previous, three-day, in-person editions of the SDTF, which brought together a hundred or so participants from all over the world in Incheon City, South Korea, the 2020/2021 SDTF is taking a different approach. Given the travel and in-person meeting restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Forum will take place through a series of two-hour online sessions over five days from 22 to 26 February 2021 (inclusive), 8:00pm to 10:00pm, Korea Standard Time.

Consequently, this edition will have a more limited scope, and a sharper focus, than in the past. This presents an opportunity to begin more in-depth exploration of the different “entry points” for transformation identified by the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report. Thus, the 2020-21 SDTF will focus on the “sustainable and just economies” entry point, considering in depth how developing countries can seize the opportunities presented by COVID-19 and long-term decarbonisation to launch – or, in some cases, accelerate – sustainable, low-carbon industrialisation.

This remains a high priority for low-income developing countries, notably in Africa, a priority reflected in SDG 9. It also involves investing in sustainable infrastructure and supporting innovative technology development, adaptation and adoption to support dynamic economies and move along a ‘green’ industrial development path, one that creates quality, productive jobs for all workers of different skill levels (SDGs 5, 8, 9).

The 2020-21 SDTF will also discuss issues interconnected with each other on such a green industrial path. It will, for instance, consider that in various developing contexts, including in African economies, the modernization of agriculture and its whole value chain is an important part of industrial sector development, linking SDGs 2 and 9 among others. Discussions will also include how sustainable, low-carbon industrialisation can contribute to poverty alleviation and greater equality (SDGs 1, 10).

The five sessions will address different topics, as explained below.

While the exact titles and outlines of each session are yet to be finalized, the first part of the **opening plenary** will be *specifically* linked to the pandemic. This session, which will also include a half-hour opening ceremony, will relate to how COVID has or has not changed the world -- opened up (or not) possibilities for truly transformative shifts away from business as usual towards sustainable options. While the session will include reference to how countries, regions and institutions are dealing with issues related to health, hunger, poverty, employment and faltering economies, its main focus will be on outlining the challenges for integrating industrialisation – especially the rapid industrialisation demanded by some countries in Africa – into sustainable development strategies.

All five sessions will deal with specific challenges for sustainable development in individual areas of the economy. Selected themes are: (i) *Building Back Better and Greener*; (ii) *Transformative Partnerships for Financing and Investing in Sustainable Infrastructure: Energy and Transport*; (iii) *Industrial, Technology and Labour Force Development Policies for Sustainable Industrial Development*; (iv) *Building Local Sustainable, Low-Carbon Agro- and Construction Materials Processing Industries*; (v) *Moving To Zero-Waste, Circular Economies*. The final session will integrate the summing up and conclusion of the 2020/2021 SDTF in its final half hour ending with the closing ceremony. The four levers of the 2019 Global

Sustainable Development Report that informed the previous SDTF – *Governance, Economy and Finance, Individual and Collective Action, and Science and Technology* – will also inform the discussion of sustainable, low-carbon industrialisation.

Governance has clearly been highly differentiated throughout regions and countries in approaches to dealing with the pandemic. Yet, the virus is exactly the kind of global challenge that can only be dealt with on a planetary basis, like the SDGs and climate change. Can we identify approaches to governance that most effectively abetted efforts to contain the pandemic? Do these same contain lessons for the global drive towards the SDGs and action on climate change?

The impact of the pandemic on the **economy and finances** of countries and institutions has been in many cases dramatic and negative. While some sectors, such as e-commerce and software for remote learning, telemedicine, and other applications have actually drawn benefits from the lockdowns put in place to slow the spread of the virus, in many other sectors, the impact has ranged from the negative to the catastrophic. Even with emergency government support in some countries, businesses and households have had to dig deeply into their resources to support themselves and many small businesses will not survive. Hunger has dramatically increased as have other negative impacts like homelessness. Both businesses and households have become more leveraged and, if economic recovery is prolonged due, for example, to failure to control the virus, there are clear perils to the health of financial systems. These could be compounded by emerging financial risks associated with climate change.

The reaction to the pandemic has shown the strengths and the shortcomings of **collective and individual action**. While initial support for medical and scientific experts was generally strong, as time went on it waned in many countries and morphed into outright resistance in others. The development of vaccines and the need to trust science if the pandemic is to be tamed may have dampened such resistance. Reaching the SDGs and tackling climate change will require sustained and informed collective and individual action over years. How can we solicit and sustain such support? What have we learned from human behaviours throughout the current crisis? How can we channel individual and collective action effectively into implementation?

The role of **science and technology** is clearly critical in identifying the areas for action and developing solutions to challenges on the way to sustainable industrial development.

Even the scientific sceptics tend often to be technology believers. The biggest challenge on this front is not scepticism but fairness and multilateral solidarity. In recent years a resurgence of economic nationalism has complicated efforts to promote international technology diffusion and transfer. This includes the risk that COVID-19 vaccine nationalism significantly delays access of poor countries. Much such technology diffusion and transfer happen through foreign direct investment (FDI), and this too has slowed significantly, in large measure as a result of the pandemic. How can we reinforce multilateral cooperation to ensure that the poorest and most vulnerable are not excluded from timely and affordable access to technologies needed to support sustainable development?

The **final session** will also produce initial conclusions and recommendations, based upon the rapporteur's reports from each of the forgoing ones.

Outputs and Follow-up

The Forum will result in a communiqué —the *Incheon Communiqué*. In addition, a volume based upon the discussions, deliberations and conclusions of the Forum —the 2020-21 SDTF Publication— will be produced during weeks following the Forum. Both the *Incheon Communiqué* and the 2020-21 SDTF Publication will be published and posted on the UNOSD’s Website.

UNOSD is also planning to organize a special 3-day face-to-face meeting in Incheon, Republic of Korea, where a selection of participants who have registered and actively taken part in the 2020-21 SDTF will be invited to share their learning and experience with peers from all over the world, when the situation allows.

Dates and time

The Forum will take place from **22 February 2021 – 26 February**, between **20:00-22:00**, Korean standard time (KST).

Theme

As indicated above, the theme of the 2020-21 Sustainable Development Transformation Forum will be *Building Back Better through Sustainable, Low-Carbon Industrialisation*.

Participants and Organisers

The 2020-21 SDTF is organized by the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development ([UNOSD](#)) of UN DESA, Division for Sustainable Development Goals ([UN DESA-DSDG](#)) in partnership with the Asia-Europe Foundation ([ASEF](#)).

The sessions will be led by the UNOSD team, namely, Mr. Jean D’Aragon, Mr. David O’Connor and Mr. Colm Foy, co-conveners of the 2020-21 SDTF.

The Forum aims to bring together an international audience composed of a cross-section of decision makers from the public and private sectors, as well as technologists, economists and social science researchers. It will have a particular focus on building back better and greener through sustainable, low-carbon industrialisation, exploring actions already in place and new opportunities for using COVID-19 recovery plans and budgets that are supportive of a low-carbon transition across the economy, with a strong emphasis on decarbonization of the industrial sector, particularly in least developed countries.

Language

The Forum will be conducted in English.

Agenda

(updated versions and more information can be found at: https://unosd.un.org/events/2021-21_SDTF)

Day One, Monday 22 February 2021	
Time	Activities
20:00 – 20:30	Session 1: Opening of the Forum Moderator: Mr. Jean D’Aragon , Senior Sustainable Development Expert, UNOSD
	- Mr. Elliott C. Harris , Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development and Chief Economist, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) - Mr. Chun Kyoo Park , Head of Office, UNOSD - Mr. Toru Morikawa , Executive Director, ASEF
20:30 – 22:00	Session 1... Theme: Building Back Better and Greener – Moderator, Colm Foy
	Expert witnesses: - Mr. David O’Connor , Coordinator of the 2020-21 SDTF - Ms. Fatima Denton , Director of the UNU Institute for Natural Resources in Africa - Mr. Louis Meuleman , Founder/Director, PublicStrategy for Sustainable Development (PS4SD), Brussels, Belgium - Ms Natasha Santos , Vice-President of Global Stakeholders Strategy and Affairs for Bayer Crop Sciences
Day Two, Tuesday 23 February 2021	
20:00 – 22:00	Session 2 Theme: Transformative Partnerships for Financing and Investing in Sustainable Infrastructure, Energy and Transport – Moderator, David O’Connor
	Expert witnesses: - Håvard Halland , Senior Economist, OECD Development Centre, Co-author, <i>Mobilising institutional investor capital for climate-aligned development</i> - David Horan , Post-doctoral Researcher, School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin - Ms. Parasto Hamed , AgResults – “Pay-for-Results” - Mr. Daniel Platz , Economic Affairs Officer, Financing for Development Office, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) (video)
Day Three, Wednesday 24 February 2021	
20:00 – 22:00	Session 3 Theme: Industrial, Technology and Labour Force Development Policies for Sustainable Industrial Development – Moderator, David O’Connor
	Expert witnesses: - Mr. Ambuj Sagar , founding Head of the School of Public Policy, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi, and member of the UN Secretary General's Independent Panel of Experts on Sustainable Development Mr. Edward Mungai , CEO, Kenya Climate Innovation Center (KCIC), Nairobi, Kenya

	<p>-Mr. Andrew Mold, Chief, Regional Integration and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Cluster, Sub-Regional Office for Eastern Africa, UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)</p> <p>-Ms Helen Haj, UNIDO Goodwill Ambassador for Sustainable Industrialisation, CEO of the Made in Africa Initiative</p>
Day Four, Thursday 25 February 2021	
20:00 – 22:00	<p>Session 4 Theme: <i>Building Local Sustainable, Low-Carbon Agro-Processing and Construction Materials Industries</i> – Moderator, David O’Connor</p>
	<p>Expert witnesses:</p> <p>-Mr. Antonio Carrillo Doblado, Head, Climate and Energy programme, LafargeHolcim Ltd</p> <p>-Mr. Nicolas Maennling, Principal Advisor - Regional Cooperation for the Sustainable Management of Mineral Resources in the Andean Region, GIZ</p> <p>-Mr. Santiago Alba-Corral, Director, Climate-Resilient Food Systems, International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada</p> <p>-Mr. Clemens Grünbühel, Senior Research Fellow, Stockholm Environment Institute</p>
Day Five, Friday 26 February 2021	
20:00 – 21:30	<p>Session 5 Themes: <i>Moving To Zero-Waste, Circular Economies</i> – Moderator, Colm Foy</p>
	<p>Expert witnesses:</p> <p>-Mr. Seung-Whee Rhee, Professor, Kyonggi University, Republic of Korea</p> <p>-Mr. David McGinty, Global Director of the Platform for Accelerating the Circular Economy (PACE) World Resources institute (WRI)</p> <p>-Ms. Grażyna Pulawska, Acting Director, Sustainable Development & Public Health Department, Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)</p> <p>-Ms Jennifer Fraser, Synergy Foundation – a case study of implementing the circular economy at the local level</p>
21:30 – 22:00	<p><i>Discussion on the whole Forum; Summing up and Closing of the Forum</i></p>
	<p><i>The Incheon Communiqué</i></p> <p>-Mr. David O’Connor, Coordinator of the 2020-21 SDTF</p> <p>Closing remarks:</p> <p>-Mr. Léon Faber, Deputy Executive Director, ASEF</p> <p>-Mr. Jean D’Aragon, Senior Sustainable Development Expert, UNOSD</p>