

Chair's summary of discussions at the Eighth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

DRAFT FOR COMMENT

30.03.2021

1. The Eighth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development was held on the theme “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in Asia and the Pacific”. During the Forum, member States of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), intergovernmental bodies, United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, and major groups and other stakeholders discussed regional perspectives on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.

I. Sustainable and resilient recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic in Asia and the Pacific

2. The Forum's discussions were informed by a ‘youth dialogue’ on the theme: “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in Asia and the Pacific”, engaging youth from the five Asia-Pacific subregions and moderated by the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations.

3. The Forum noted that the COVID-19 pandemic was a developmental, environmental, human rights, and security concern. It called attention to its devastating socio-economic impacts across the region, and the resulting diminished prospects for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It noted that the disruptions of COVID-19 had revealed regional, national and subnational inequalities and vulnerabilities that had long exposed member States and their societies to economic and other shocks. Several important sectors had been severely impacted, including the tourism and hospitality industries.

4. Delegations shared their governments' responses to the disruptions of the coronavirus pandemic and to stimulate recovery. Measures included stimulus packages, programmes to improve living standards based on a “people first” principles” and people-centred development; a ‘Self-reliant India’ campaign, and green recovery strategies to address both SDG 13 and COVID-19; support to health and education sectors; various provisions for delayed loan payments, tax breaks and incentives for re-skilling workers; income support; and free vaccines for the most vulnerable. Others included emergency cash payments, low-interest working capital loans, household electricity subsidies, and health-related budget increases. The Forum noted that partnerships with, and engagement of civil society, private sector, local communities and other stakeholders played an important role in inclusive recovery efforts.

5. Delegations pointed to the role of international solidarity in the COVID-19 response including through regional and inter-subregional cooperation. There was a call to the global community to recognize COVID-19 vaccines as a global public good. Another delegation pointed to coordination, partnerships and sharing of experiences and good practices as key to achieving the goals. In this regard, the Forum noted with appreciation

the contributions of multilateral banks and the support provided by several member States for medical supplies, vaccines and other interventions to support health security, economic recovery, and stability. The Forum also noted financial contributions made to the United Nations system's response, including the joint emergency response initiatives by the United Nations International Childrens' Emergency Fund, United Nations Development Programme, World Food Programme, World Health Organization and other United Nations agencies, as well as the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and its Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19. One delegation identified a role for the United Nations in providing recommendations and a plan of action for safely opening borders and promoting travel and trade. Another called for member States and partners to increase collaboration and partnership around priority areas, taking into consideration the 2020 High-Level Mid-Term Review for SAMOA Pathway.

6. The Forum emphasized that despite the challenges of the pandemic, commitment to achieving the SDGs and implementation efforts continued, and advanced. Some delegations reported on past and upcoming contributions to global follow up and review at the High-level political Forum for sustainable development. One delegation expressed appreciation to ESCAP for support in nationalization of SDGs, strengthening of statistical capacity and opportunities for peer learning. Another expressed appreciation to the secretariat for the support of the development of the national Roadmap for SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy). The Forum also noted with appreciation the financial support provided to advancing 2030 Agenda implementation by economies in transition, Pacific Small island Developing States and South-East Asian countries.

7. Echoing the extreme challenges cited by government delegations, the representatives from major groups and other stakeholders urged member States to anchor recovery on development justice, including social justice and environmental sustainability. High poverty and hunger rates, rising inequality and a triple climate-biodiversity and pollution crisis were emphasized. It was asserted that human rights standards had been compromised in some aspects of the COVID-19 response. Strengthening the agency of people had positive impact on COVID-response, but more attention was needed to vulnerabilities that particularly affected marginalized and excluded groups (older people, people with disabilities, those living with HIV), essential workers, farmers and fisherfolk, and vulnerabilities due to systemic issues. Indigenous peoples; women; people subject to marginalization and exclusion due to sexual and gender orientation; youth; persons with disabilities; small and medium enterprises; and those discriminated against based on work and descent were all impacted.

II. Review of regional progress on the Sustainable Development Goals

8. Member States were provided with an update on the progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific. The secretariat's presentation highlighted significant progress in some goals and targets, but also slow progress, and in some cases regression, in others.

9. The Forum emphasized the resolve of member States to ensure that no-one is left behind, and to build back better towards SDG achievement, sustainability, and resilience. It urged solidarity, strengthening regional cooperation and revitalizing and deepening global partnerships. Delegates pointed to the need for investment in strengthening national health systems, climate action, harnessing innovation, and intensifying multi-stakeholder partnership. Delegations also highlighted commitment to carbon neutrality by

2050 and accelerating climate action, including through the issuance of green bonds for climate finance. The pledges made by more than 300 local governments to become ‘Zero Carbon Cities’ by 2050 were highlighted. Strategies referenced included the ‘sufficiency economy philosophy’, and a ‘bio-circular-green economy model’. Air pollution mitigation and disaster risk reduction were other areas of focus for member States. The Forum recognized that the pandemic had accelerated digitalization, enabled the continuity of public services and business operations, and provided opportunities to enhance the efficiency of government institutions. Digitalization would play an important role in building resilience and a ‘digital economy’. Closing the digital divide was a priority but required considerable investment. Steps taken to overcome regression on SDG progress caused by the pandemic and accelerate SDG implementation also faced the challenges of natural and climate induced disasters, ongoing sanctions, food insecurity and economic contraction among others. Small island developing States noted that many development challenges were connected, but especially so in the context of the threat of climate change. This remained the greatest threat to small island developing states in particular, and required better access to climate finance and adaptive capacity building. The Pacific 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent was an important reference in this regard.

10. The Forum also pointed to the need to strengthen, widen and move towards universal social protection systems to enhance the resilience of Asia-Pacific societies. The Forum also recognized the role of infrastructure and connectivity in enhancing industry and innovation. Delegates also emphasized trade facilitation, better transport linkages and supply chain optimization, as well as triangular cooperation. Other priority areas cited included data collection, policy coherence, and accountability. There was a call for continued sharing of best practices, knowledge and technical expertise through capacity building to enhance data collection and analysis and to address data gaps. One delegation noted the application of systems thinking to analyse inter-linkages between SDGs and national development plans with appreciation for the support provided in this regard.

11. Major groups and other stakeholders highlighted that local governments required more resources to support investment in localization of SDGs at the subnational level. There were calls for a ‘Green Deal for Asia and the Pacific’ to address regional and global sustainability challenges and achieve a triple bottom line; for a new social contract to ensure economic recovery and resilience and promote rights for all workers, equality and inclusion; proposals for transformational community and social entrepreneurship and for nature-based solutions for reducing hunger; ensuring inclusion and voice for people with disabilities; gender-responsive social protection for vulnerable women; and recognition of the plight and mistreatment of indigenous peoples. Attention was called to the issues of migrant workers protection against abuse and trafficking.

12. One representative from an international organization noted that 2020 was one of the warmest years on record and informed the participants of its initiatives to support action on SDG 6 and mitigate climate risk. The Forum was warned that incomplete and uneven recovery and other factors, including a decline in labour force participation of women and loss of education opportunities, would leave long-lasting scars on economies. While mounting debt would need to be addressed, greener and sustainable recovery strategies could provide a boost to the economy.

III. United Nations acting as one on supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

13. The Forum considered the work of the United Nations system to strengthen collaboration and coordination on implementation support for the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific. This was supported by opening remarks from the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations and presentations of the co Vice-chairs of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Asia and the Pacific. Examples of system-wide results of the collective work of the United Nations development systems at the regional level, including the issue-based coalitions were highlighted. The Asia-Pacific Knowledge Management Hub was also launched.¹

14. The Forum expressed appreciation to the United Nations development system's actions to assess and support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, despite the disruptions caused by COVID-19. The Forum noted the efforts of the United Nations development system on capacity building and providing resources for developing solutions towards socio-economic COVID-19 recovery. It was also emphasized that regional and global cooperation was imperative to improve air quality.

15. Several delegations called for strong coordination and collaboration at the country level between governments and the United Nations development system. One delegation expressed the hope that the issue-based coalitions would expand and continue to advance regional cooperation in addressing air pollution in the region. The technical assistance for the formulation of Voluntary National Review reports, and data analysis was recognized. The Forum also recognized the role of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund, in overcoming the health and development crisis, including through scaling up social protection programmes in response to COVID-19. The adoption of the Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific, 2020 was welcomed as a basis for further regional cooperation. Several delegations noted their national efforts and programmes to strengthen social protection. The Forum was informed that three Least-Developed Countries in the region faced the simultaneous challenges of meeting the requirements of graduation from Least-Developed Country Status by 2026, and COVID-19 response and recovery. The call for development partners to act quickly to support and ensure the success of these efforts was noted.

16. Major groups and other stakeholders noted that despite global commitments, the socio-economic perspectives and concerns of women, youth and marginalized and vulnerable stakeholders were not sufficiently reflected in national policies, requiring greater accountability of governments and support by the United Nations system. Several stakeholders called for consideration of gender and human rights and for their collective voices to be heard in the process of regional discussions and reporting on women and youth empowerment.

¹ <https://knowledge.unasiapacific.org/>

IV. Review of regional progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: parallel round tables for an in-depth assessment of Goals 1,2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17

17. The Forum received summary reports of the rapporteurs of nine parallel round tables dedicated to Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17 which reviewed progress towards each Goal under Agenda item 2. Each of the round tables was organized by United Nations system entities, with inputs from other stakeholders, under the overall coordination of ESCAP. The full reports of all nine round tables are provided in ESCAP/RFSD/2021/L.2/Add.1.

18. The recommendations of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 1 (No poverty) covered the following strategic areas:

19. Build human capabilities and empower government's service providers. Eradicating all forms of poverty requires significant increases in investments in building human capabilities such as health, nutrition, and education. Capacity of government service providers needs to be improved. Building of capabilities of people should be a regular feature and be done even before a crisis hit.

20. Promote and protect economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to social security. Expanding universal social protection along the Social Protection Floors following a life cycle approach is key to reducing poverty. Social protection systems need to be coherent with other policies as well as disaster-responsive and risk-informed.

21. Foster women's participation in all facets of decision makings for nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures. To enhance economic empowerment, the targeted social protection measures are required, to address women's needs. It is important to recognize the transformational impact for women of increased ownership and opportunities to access to land and resources while also reflecting the nuance of gender identification and the impact this has on the effectiveness of response measures.

22. Build the resilience of poor, population at-risk and marginalized groups, and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to shocks. To enhance economic empowerment, the targeted social protection measures are required, to address women's needs. It is important to recognise the transformational impact for women of increased ownership and opportunities to access to land and resources while also reflecting the nuance of gender identification and the impact this has on the effectiveness of response measures.

23. Enhance climate and disaster risk reduction action to protect life, livelihoods and reduce disruptions in access to infrastructures and basic services. Management of disaster and climate risks is necessary to minimise the human and economic loss. Additional investments are required in strengthening multi-hazard disaster risk governance systems, to enable multi-sectoral implementation of such strategies for effective reduction of deaths and losses.

24. Enhance capacity to collect and use better data. Disaggregated data is necessary for identifying who are the left behind. Collecting comprehensive and disaggregated data requires building frameworks for enhancing data development and analysis skills. Governments should partner with the private sector to enhance their data collection capacities.

25. The recommendations of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero hunger) covered the following strategic areas:
26. Investments and public- and private partnerships needed in food systems. Investments are needed to make nutritious food more affordable, create efficient value chains, and promote healthy diet communication and education through social media. Food fortification is another avenue to improve nutrition.
27. Needed cost-effective data collection, surveillance and monitoring of food security, nutrition, and livelihoods. Digitalization in data collection require both technologies, infrastructure, and governance along the food chains. Actions are required for data governance, data privacy and transparency to avoid inappropriate use.
28. Upscaling digitalization across the food system. Digitalization is key driver to transform food systems and improve efficiency through information and communication technology infrastructure, extension services and other enabling conditions. Digitalization should ensure inclusive access to technologies and skill development, avoid exclusion and narrow the digital divide between rural and urban areas and between men and women.
29. Strengthening urban agriculture and short value chains to improve nutrition for the urban poor. More countries are promoting urban food through incentives, regulations and accessible technologies. Urban food governance is needed to protect the environment, minimize pollution and ensure safe food for human health.
30. Leveraging social protection system to enhance food security and nutrition. Expanding social protection requires collaboration with other sectors such as health, education and agriculture, as well as involvement of civil society.
31. Stronger investments in disaster and pandemic preparedness. Investing in education and research, disaster and pandemic preparedness, early warning, monitoring, and response systems especially in rural areas and among small-scale enterprises.
32. Increase women's access to productive resources, technology and skills. Women need policy participation to improve access to productive assets such as land, better training and skill development, rural services, and incentives to engage in agriculture and urban farming.
33. The round table on Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good health and well-being) made several recommendations to advance progress on the SDG 3 in Asia and the Pacific, covering the following strategic areas:
34. It was recommended that countries focus on health systems strengthening to achieve more equitable coverage of health services, including sexual, reproductive, maternal and newborn health services. Countries should strengthen the capacity of their health workforce, paying particular attention to services for vulnerable population groups and those in fragile settings.
35. Innovations in healthcare provision should be explored to ensure coordination and continuity of care, using new technologies. To achieve better coverage and quality of health services, it is recommended that countries invest in health and logistic management information systems, strengthen data quality and improve the availability of disaggregated data.

36. Quality of care should be improved using human-centered approaches to reach those left behind and to promote efficient and equitable care, while maintaining quality across populations. Countries should increase engagement and awareness among both health and non-health stakeholders, promote “health in all policies”, ensure inclusiveness and adopt policy frameworks that promote integrated approaches between environmental, animal, and human health.

37. It was recommended to increase health expenditures, including improving domestic resource mobilisation, and ensure that all countries have allocated sufficient resources to strengthen their health systems and finance their national health plans, including pandemics and other emergencies preparedness and response plans.

38. In conclusion, the round table on SDG3 urged all countries to sustain and protect the progress that has been made thus far in this region, and to recover the gains lost during the pandemic. It pointed out that ‘Health for all’ was within reach and urged re-commitment to reduce inequities and to improve quality of health services using data-driven interventions and cross-sectoral partnerships for innovation.

39. The round table on Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth) made several recommendations on the Goal for Asia and the Pacific. The round table discussion acknowledged the setback that countries in the region are facing in their capacities to advance on the numerous lofty targets of Goal 8 as economies and labour markets are still reeling from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The discussion reminded us that those who have been most affected by the crisis are those who are already among society’s most vulnerable - women, youth, informal workers and migrant workers, among them. The crisis thus makes it even more urgent for governments, workers’ and employers’ organizations and civil society organizations to work together to come up with durable solutions to create job-rich sustainable economic growth that benefits all segments of the population.

40. Among the numerous policy recommendations put forth by the group to advance progress on Goal 8 particular emphasis is placed on the importance of integrated planning to promote the principals of the Goal and collectively design and implement policies and programmes. Linked to this is the call to strengthen labour market institutions for ensuring effective and inclusive labour market governance. Here the need to extend the reach of labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments to vulnerable groups was emphasized, including with consideration given to women, youth, persons with disabilities, home-based workers and migrant workers. One particular labour right that was promoted is occupational safety and health, with the recommendation put forth for renewed commitments to protecting all workers from the current and future pandemics and other emerging occupational, safety and health hazards.

41. Other policy recommendations include the necessity to step up investments in human capital to better facilitate labour market transitions, to scale up investment in decent work, including for informal workers, and to pay particular attention – including through enhanced public investment – and to the recognition of unpaid care work, the advancement of equal pay and the removal of all barriers to female labour force participation.

42. The recommendations of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced inequalities) covered the following strategic areas.

43. Increase investment in social protection. All countries in the region need to step up investments in universal, accessible, gender-sensitive and disaster-responsive social protection to address inequalities.
44. Promote decent job creation and equal pay. Policies should be developed along the four pillars of decent work, including principles and rights at work, job creation, social protection and social dialogue.
45. Address discrimination. In recognition that inequalities are often the result of discriminatory laws, policies and social practices, Governments should adopt and implement effective anti-discrimination agendas.
46. Protect the most vulnerable from the impact of natural and human-caused hazards. As demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the most vulnerable are disproportionately affected by shocks and unexpected disruptions, thus widening inequality gaps. It is essential to address the disempowerment of marginalized communities and their lack of voice and visibility as a root cause of vulnerability.
47. Address inequalities faced by migrants. Efforts to achieve equality must include all migrants, including addressing inequality as an adverse driver of displacement.
48. Identify the furthest behind through sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data. Identifying those who are the furthest behind through rigorous analysis and evidence will be the foundation for developing inequality-reducing policies.
49. Address the digital divide. The ongoing pandemic has demonstrated how digitalization can exacerbate pre-existing inequalities. Specific attention should be given to the existing and projected future digital divide in the region as it pertains to the socioeconomically disadvantaged, older persons, and persons with disabilities.
50. The recommendations of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 12 (Responsible consumption and production) cover the following strategic areas:
 51. Adopting efficient plastic waste management systems. Key issues include the need for strong regulatory and legal frameworks, national roadmaps and support to local governments to invest in capital and infrastructure.
 52. Strengthening sustainable consumption and production (SCP) monitoring systems and indicators.
 53. Increasing awareness raising on Sustainable Consumption and Production and SDG 12.
 54. Mainstreaming of approaches through Sustainable Consumption and Production integration into core national strategies and more holistic approaches to SCP policies that address production as well as lifestyles and consumption.
 55. Empowering women entrepreneurs. Financing women entrepreneurs in sustainable products and services as well as providing capacity building, ensuring their access to technology, designing supporting policies, and

establishing financial frameworks are the keys to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

56. Promoting green recovery as the engine for COVID-19 recovery. This includes the removal of subsidies to energy products and the revenue freed up could be used for social welfare and social safety nets.

57. Enhancing stakeholder involvement including the private sector, communities and the informal sector.

58. Strengthening regulatory frameworks for Sustainable Consumption and Production. Policies that can support this include strict industrial standards on environmental protection and pollution mitigation, the internalization of environmental externalities into the price of goods and services, and strict standards on air pollution and emissions from vehicles.

59. Accelerating efforts to implement the 10-year framework of programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production.

60. Adopting an integrated circular economy approach. The region must transition toward a more circular model that strengthens resource efficiency, improves waste management.

61. Strengthening capacity building, technical and financial support. Including strengthening domestic support and the development of financial instruments at national level is needed and collaborating on climate finance.

62. The recommendations of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 13 (Climate action) covered the following strategic areas:

63. Increasing ambition levels in Nationally Determined Contributions. Countries must undertake ambitious climate actions to achieve the 1.5o C pathway, including through decarbonization, reduction in gas use, transitions to renewable energy, and commitments to carbon neutrality, while increasing resilience and adaptation efforts. Countries must seize COVID-19 recoveries to align opportunities to accelerate climate and disaster risk reduction with green recoveries which avoid climate intensive actions. Redesign of finance and investment systems to become climate action compatible are a key component of such recoveries. Climate action conditionality should be included in post-COVID-19 recovery packages, while reforms to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies, integrating climate change and disaster risk reduction into public financial management and private investment, are critical priorities. Climate finance should include focus on adaptation and consider Loss and Damage issues.

64. Adopting an inclusive whole-of-society approach, including through:

- i. Enhanced institutional frameworks to support ambitious climate action
- ii. Enhanced capacities of local governments to accelerate local climate actions. Empowerment of local authorities and communities must include access to finance, data and information, and capacity building.
- iii. Strengthening climate information services for vulnerable sectors and communities, integrating human rights approaches, and developing gender-responsive monitoring systems, data collection and applications. Policy actions should include empowerment of youth, women, vulnerable and marginalized communities.

- iv. Investments in environmentally and climate friendly technologies which benefit women by providing equal green job opportunities
 - v. Mainstreaming Climate Change in Education for Sustainable Development. Education on climate change should leverage co-benefits with SDG 4, and incorporate policies addressing disruption to educational opportunities resulting from climate change.
65. There was consensus in the roundtable that we must accelerate action, be more ambitious and develop inclusive solutions to realize the climate targets.
66. The recommendations of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) covered the following strategic areas:
67. Uphold fundamental freedoms and ensure public access to information. Prioritize States' accountability in ensuring access to information and freedom of expression. Protect journalists, human rights and environmental defenders and ensure that legislation meets international human rights standards.
68. Ensure equal access to justice for all. Explore innovations on e-justice while ensuring accessibility for all, including persons with disabilities. Expand online court hearings and provide remote access to legal advice, while upholding international standards relating to human rights and rule of law.
69. Strengthen environmental rule of law and protect environmental defenders. Strengthen environmental rule of law through effective legal frameworks, strong institutions, access to information and justice in environmental matters, and provide safe enabling environment for environmental defenders, including indigenous peoples.
70. Address discrimination and stigma. Counter hate speech with freedom of expression, the right to information and public communication that rejects xenophobia, racism and all forms of intolerance. Increase efforts to change negative social norms and take a whole of society approach to address on and offline mis/disinformation.
71. Improve the collection and quality of data, particularly disaggregated data. Strengthen national capacities for data collection, analysis and data prioritization, including to disaggregate data by sex, race, colour, age, language, religion, national, ethnic or social origin, disability, migration or other status.
72. Increase efforts to eliminate gender-based violence and violence against children. Increase efforts to eliminate gender-based violence and violence against children, including by addressing discrimination, harmful social norms and practices and gender stereotypes. Strengthen laws, policies and national action plans, and increase the capacity of frontline workers. Take additional measures for persons at heightened risk of violence.
73. Strengthen responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. Increase efforts to promote the full, equal and meaningful participation of everyone in decision-making at all levels. Commit to diversity, gender parity and equitable representation in decision-making bodies. Amend electoral codes and introduce temporary special measures to strengthen participation of under-represented groups.

74. Strengthen efforts towards providing a legal identity for all through universal civil registration and vital statistics. Accelerate efforts towards universal registration of births, deaths and other vital events, to achieve legal identity for all. Focus on hard-to-reach and marginalized groups to ensure registration for all.

75. The round table on Sustainable Development Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) made several recommendations.

76. Participants recognized that strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the partnership for sustainable development, is essential for achieving the 2030 Agenda. The Roundtable took note that the Asia-Pacific region is not on track to meet any of the 17 SDG Goals by 2030. To accelerate progress, deliberations focused on strengthening fair and open means of implementation and global partnerships that “leave no-one behind”.

77. While partners in the Asia-Pacific region are invited to mobilise resources and scale up South-South and triangular cooperation, the region will need to work on a comprehensive and concrete proposal to enhance its role and impact particularly within the scope of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

78. The Roundtable also recognized the criticality of investments in national data governance, stewardship and innovation, to guarantee data accessibility, ownership and use and in a shared vision of universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems to advance implementation of the 2030 Agenda and ensure equitable coverage of all people and geographical areas especially for populations hardest hit by the pandemic.

79. Participants agreed that public finance is critical for financing COVID-19 recovery packages and achieving the SDGs, especially to provide for public goods and ensure equity. In this context, governments need to widen the tax base and strengthen tax administration. Private sector finance needs to be leveraged at much larger scale and directed more effectively to build forward better and achieve the SDGs.

80. Finally, participants noted that contraction in trade had shrunk the fiscal space of developing countries for fight with COVID-19 crisis. Amid the global shift towards digital economy, they called for the acceleration of trade digitalization to make trade more inclusive and with more access to developed markets. The participants stressed the need for providing sufficient policy space for countries to address COVID-19 crisis, as well as to facilitate technology transfer towards developing countries, including for closing of the digital divide.

81. Following the delivery of the summaries of the round table priority actions, member State and other delegations addressed the Forum. Several delegations informed the Forum of their efforts to integrate the SDGs in their national planning, of their progress on the SDGs including in the context of the pandemic and highlighted the crucial need to monitor and track progress on the SDGs especially in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

82. The Forum stressed the need for regional collaboration. Specific areas of need included understanding the effects of the pandemic on the SDGs; a coordinated and integrated response to the pandemic rooted in the SDG framework; and enhancing collective efforts to improve data collection and analysis.

83. The Forum was informed about the discussions of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly which highlighted that the pandemic created threats but also opportunities for transforming people's relationship with nature through green recovery packages. Some delegates also stressed that the pandemic is an opportunity to review the current development models to be more just as well as environment and people-centered. One delegate highlighted the importance of the regional level follow-up and review processes of the SDGs, with the recommendations that they propose specific solutions to address systemic barriers to SDG implementation and that the links between the global, regional and national level follow-up and review processes are strengthened and more inclusive.

V. Strengthening follow-up and review to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

84. The session was informed by a panel discussion sharing experiences in the preparation of VNRs. The panel highlighted that more ambitious objectives were set by countries preparing the VNRs for the second and third times. Generally, such second and third generation VNRs provided deeper analysis and made the process of developing the VNR more inclusive and innovative. Deepening stakeholder engagement was seen as a strategy to enhance implementation of SDGs, and panelists pointed to the need to include civil society organizations, marginalized groups, academia, environmental and youth groups in the VNR processes. It was shared that the second VNR was also an opportunity to better analyze the situation of the most vulnerable groups. It was recognized that data collection should involve not only national statistical offices but also business entities and civil society groups.

85. The Forum noted that several countries had engaged in consultation processes through video conferences and written surveys as an adaptation to the coronavirus pandemic disruption. It was further noted that parliamentarians were important stakeholders for consultation and in building accountability in the implementation of the SDGs.

86. Delegations presented key features and lessons learnt from their Voluntary National Review processes, emphasizing stakeholder engagement, the need for localizing the SDGs and stressing aspects of data gathering and alignment of reporting processes. Innovative approaches in promoting SDGs such as utilizing SDGs as an instrument for local revitalization of local communities, the development of SDG awards, and providing financial incentives to cities. One country developed an unofficial VNR on an annual basis, used to assess progress made in implementation at the national and local levels.

87. The Forum noted advances regarding planning frameworks, and localizing of targets that ensure a whole of society approach. The importance of aligning SDG reporting and review with surveys, policy reviews, and reporting obligations such as those under the human rights conventions, was underlined. Holistic planning approaches were also urged to ensure social 'embeddedness' and coherence of policy frameworks. New partnerships were needed to mobilize more funds for SDG implementation. One delegation urged United Nations agencies to recognize the data collected and provided through the national SDG indicator matrices, as inputs to SDG data portals and United Nations reporting.

88. Delegations of major groups and other stakeholders called for urgent attention to the loss of life by those asserting civil rights, to reverse trends of shrinking civic and democratic space, and promote inclusion in policy making, transparency and accountability, as well as attention to tackling systemic barriers, including global economic policies that counter progress. There was a further call to ensure voice, protection and empowerment of sexual and gender minorities. Specific indicators had been developed to track 'development justice'. The institutionalization of multistakeholder platforms was emphasized to ensure all voices are heard and need to be institutionalized.
