STI FORUM

Science, Technology & Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals

6th Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals

4-5 May 2021, UN HQ New York (virtual)

Session 2: Effective paths towards the SDGs: STI for ending poverty and hunger, enhancing human well-being and building resilience

Background note and guiding questions

Background

Science, technology and innovation (STI) are critical for progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including toward SDG 1 (End poverty in all its forms everywhere); SDG 2 (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture); SDG 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages); and SDG 16 (Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies).

Poverty and hunger are on the rise after years of decline, a trend exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 120 million people are estimated to have been pushed into extreme poverty in 2020, reversing a two-decade long downward trend. Past progress in many areas of health and well-being, including declining maternal mortality and expanding vaccination programmes, face headwinds. At the same time, the pandemic has necessitated new approaches to service delivery in many countries.

Levels of hunger are on the rise with 690 million undernourished people globally and it has been estimated that the COVID-19 pandemic could add up to 132 million food-insecure people to this number. Food insecurity is soaring, estimated to have affected some 265 million people in 2020, a number that doubled in a year. Pandemic impacts have exacerbated acute food insecurity due to climate events and conflict: in Burkina Faso, South Sudan, north east Nigeria and Yemen, parts of the population face a risk of famine in 2021.

The International Labour Organization warns that 495 million jobs were lost during the second quarter of 2020. Poor informal workers in urban areas, many of them women or young workers, have been particularly affected by loss of income, as have migrant workers and other vulnerable groups. In turn, 800 million people worldwide who rely on remittances are at risk which could increase acute food insecurity. The world is also lagging behind in promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Innovations and technologies can be useful tools to help reverse these trends but can also exacerbate existing socio-economic disparities. Many countries expanded their social protection systems in response to the pandemic, innovating and applying technologies to support vulnerability analysis, programme targeting, enrollment, and delivery including using digital technologies. Access to information, transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness of decision-making processes can also be supported through adequate STI. The post-pandemic recovery will further leverage opportunities in the digital space. Adequate access to these innovations and technologies should be ensured, in particular for the most

vulnerable groups and countries, while they should also be scaled up as quickly as possible in a context appropriate manner.

Objectives

This is the first of two sessions dedicated to the SDGs in-focus at the HLPF 2021. This session will look specifically at how STI can advance progress toward achieving SDGs 1, 2, 3, and 16, including through leveraging their interlinkages with the rest of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Discussions will include new approaches to accelerate SDG progress through innovations, focused priorities for STI development and successful experiences from the pandemic response that can be scaled up to have impact across multiple goals and targets as well as ways to improve the science-policy-society interface; increasing scientific collaboration globally for tackling major challenges.

Format

The session will be structured as a moderated panel discussion (5 minutes per panelist). After the panelists' interventions, the moderator will take comments and questions from the audience during an interactive discussion. The session will close with a brief presentation of main outcomes of the discussion by the moderator.

Questions for discussion

The discussion will be guided by the following questions:

- In the immediate term, what are some of the most promising innovations and technologies for reversing COVID-19 related setbacks and building back better in SDGs 1, 2 and 3?
- What kind of innovations and technologies can be harnessed to strengthen national systems to best deliver on SDG16?
- How can access to these innovations and technologies, in particular for the most vulnerable groups and countries, be scaled up quickly?

Supporting documents/publications

- Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future is Now: Science for Achieving Sustainable Development (Available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/gsdr2019)
- The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020 (Available at: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/)
- UNDESA, 2019, World Public Sector Report: Sustainable Development Goal 16: Focus on public institutions (Available at: https://publicadministration.un.org/en/Research/World-Public-Sector-Reports)
- WFP Global Update on COVID-19: November 2020 | World Food Programme