

**2021 HLPF Thematic Review
Expert Group Meetings
Virtual, 18-20 May 2021**

Meeting Summary for Session on SDG 12,13,17

Introduction

The UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs, together with UN Environment Programme, the UN Industrial Development Organization, and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, convened a session to address the cross-cutting issues on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 12, 13 and 17. The session was part of the expert group meeting (EGM) series held virtually from 18-20 May 2021 in preparation for the thematic review sessions of the 2021 High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development. This EGM session was held to prepare for the [HLPF session](#) that will cover the same set of SDGs.

Participants came to the table with a common understanding as a starting point: human activities are putting extreme pressure on the planet, driving us toward planetary crises including climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste. There is a clear link between the biodiversity and natural resources agenda and the climate agenda, and sustainable production and consumption (SCP) is a common thread running through these crises, given the fact that there is a huge amount of carbon embedded in production and consumption systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided the backdrop to the discussion, and participants discussed the importance of addressing COVID-19 and climate change and advancing SCP simultaneously. Embedding climate action and disaster risk reduction and accelerating the shift towards more sustainable consumption and production modes within COVID-19 response, recovery, and rehabilitation was seen as an opportunity to stimulate the transformation necessary to achieve not only the climate-related, SCP and biodiversity-related SDGs, but also to safeguard progress towards the 2030 Agenda as a whole.

Agenda

- I. Opening
 - Moderated by Ms. Stephanie Rambler, Sustainable Development Officer, UN-DESA
- II. Reporting back from SDG-specific sessions
 - Mr. Edward Clarence Smith, independent expert, reported on the SDG 12 session
 - Dr. Tabi Joda, Executive Director of GreenAid and Lead of One Billion Trees for Africa, reported on the SDG 13 session
- III. Stage setting - Cross cutting approaches to SDGs 12, 13 and 17
 - Ms. Kobie Brand, Chief Executive Officer and Regional Director, ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability) Africa
- IV. Breakout sessions on the guiding questions
- V. Reporting back from breakout sessions and closing

- Mr. Jocelyn Bleriot, Executive Lead, Institutions, Governments and Cities, Ellen MacArthur Foundation
- Mr. Jan Raes, Global Sustainability Advisor at ABN AMRO Bank
- Ms. Louise Mabulo, Founder, The Cacao Project, Young Champion of the Earth 2019, United Nations Environment Programme

Guiding questions

- What broad-based transformations are needed in consumption and production systems to arrest climate change and rebalance the relationship between human society and nature?
- How can transformations towards carbon neutrality also promote sustainable consumption and production?
- How should these transformations also ensure that no one is left behind?
- What are the opportunities to be realized (and pitfalls to be avoided) in the immediate and medium terms towards these ends? How can international cooperation support?

Successes and challenges¹

The COVID-19 pandemic saw a temporary reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions, however, the rebound is expected to put the world off-track on achieving our climate ambitions. EGM participants cited the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Emissions Gap Report and Global Methane Assessment released by the Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC) and UNEP, which show that the world is not making adequate progress. As of 31 December 2020, 190 Parties have communicated their first Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), and 48 countries have communicated a second or updated NDC with half articulating more quantified targets and indicators. As of 31 March 2021, 125 of 154 developing countries are undertaking measures for National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), prioritizing their formulation and implementation. While many country commitments have been made, they in many cases have not been translated into action.

Some progress has been made on SCP commitments, but participants agreed that action must be ramped up in this area as well. The 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (10YFP) is the first target of SDG 12. Through its One Planet network, more than 4,000 policies and implementation activities from 194 different countries were reported for the period 2013-2020. This includes over 700 policies reported since 2017 by 83 Member States plus the European Union.² In addition, governments are recognizing the importance of public procurement, and 40 governments have adopted Sustainable Public Procurement policies and action plans, to promote more responsible purchasing practices and sustainable supply chains. Consultations³ conducted in the context of UNEA4 resolution 1 "*Innovative pathways to achieve sustainable consumption and production*" identified that the application of these policies and tools to foster tangible change remains limited. Most policy interventions are sectoral or stand-alone plans, hindering the potential to overcome sectoral silos and align existing policies and regulations.

¹ Data are from the Report of the Secretary-General on SDG Progress 2021 (advance, unedited copy)

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27610SG_SDG_Progress_report_2021.pdf

² 2021 HLPF Progress report on the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (forthcoming)

³ UNEA 5 report "Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/1 on innovative pathways to achieve sustainable consumption and production", available at <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/34684/K2002486-E.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

Participants recognized that integrating a risk perspective will be critical for making effective policies. Achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, and the Paris Agreement, is contingent upon the ability to furnish decision makers with risk insights that allow effective pathways to resilience. Approximately 80% of recorded disasters are associated with climate-related hazards and events such as floods, droughts, and storms. As of April 2021, 118 countries and territories had reported the development and adoption of national and/or local disaster risk reduction strategies, increasing from 48 countries and territories in 2015 when the 2030 Agenda and Sendai Framework were adopted.

The session emphasized the extreme urgency of system-wide transformation, not only to prevent ecosystem collapse and arrest climate change but also because these planetary crises are inextricably tied to social crises including inequality. Participants noted how the exploitation of natural resources often linked to the exploitation of vulnerable communities including indigenous peoples and others. In addition, the Covid crisis laid bare and exacerbated challenges facing vulnerable communities including farmers and those working in micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), who struggled with supply chain challenges and scarce credit and capital. On the global scale as well, with unequal distribution of vaccines and other medical resources, the Covid pandemic revealed deep inequities.

Participants agreed that inclusiveness should be in the DNA of SDGs 12 and 13—and in the 2030 Agenda at large. A whole of society and whole of government approach is needed, one that brings in all members of society as changemakers, including women, youth, older people, people living with disabilities, smallholder farmers and other traditionally marginalized groups. The discussion also addressed the fact that local and indigenous knowledge is a rich source of solutions, particularly in addressing climate change and reducing disaster risk as well as for circular economy solutions.

Interlinkages, synergies and trade-offs

As noted above, there are obvious interlinkages and synergies among SDGs 12,13, and 17. SCP is a transversal issue, with more than 50 of the 169 SDG targets in 13 different goals that are dependent on the shift to SCP patterns. During the expert group discussion, experts highlighted that if material consumption continues to grow the consequences of this trend will inhibit the achievement of all the SDGs.

To reverse the dangerous trends in material consumption and climate change, participants noted that the concept of “reconnecting” can be useful—reconnecting human society and nature, reconnecting food production with a healthy planet and healthy people, reconnecting young people, rural people and other vulnerable communities with the globalized world. Specific measures, like halting deforestation and ramping up afforestation to address climate change by creating carbon sinks and to safeguard biodiversity and water catchment, were offered as examples. The mutual benefits to various communities were emphasized, and participants noted that there is great potential for social development and advancement of entrepreneurship and improved life and livelihoods through embracing SCP and climate action.

At the same time, to stay true to the commitment to leave no one behind in all development activities, policies must be made in a holistic manner so negative impacts can be anticipated and mitigated, and the discussion addressed a number of these potential tradeoffs as well. Achieving SDG 12 and 13 must not jeopardize the eradication of poverty in all its dimensions. A “just transition” must further

provide for those whose livelihoods depend on the old ways of producing and consuming and must not create new or exacerbate existing social and economic vulnerabilities. Priority should therefore be given to planning a transition to a circular economy which maximizes employment and skill development opportunities, ensuring that decent jobs are promoted across the entire supply chain.

In another example, participants noted that when forests are used as carbon sinks, there must be regard for people, often indigenous people, living in them, and, similarly, governments should not evict families to make room for new developments, for example solar farms. Specific industries like mining, which provides, for example, the minerals used in the batteries vital for scaling up renewable energy and sustainable transport, must be developed in an ethical manner that protects and bolsters the health and human rights of workers and communities, while ensuring minimal impact on the environment. Participants recalled that extractive industries are operating on the basis of agreements which do not reflect the interest of local communities and the way the local stakeholders are profiting or suffering from this extraction is key to a just transition.

Recommendations for action: Means of implementation, mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress

Participants agreed that the coming decade will need to focus on urgent implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with governments and other decision makers moving beyond the pledging and planning stages into action.

The pandemic recovery period may provide an unprecedented opportunity to overcome inertia if governments respond with the requisite political will and direct recovery investments toward renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure, disaster risk reduction, nature-based solutions, and green jobs, as well as international cooperation for a truly global impact. The COVID-19 recovery packages also offer a unique opportunity to incentivize the shift towards more sustainable consumption and production and circular economy. Total spending announced by the 89 countries amounted to USD 15.1 trillion at the beginning of May, of which USD 2 trillion was recovery-type spending. About 20% of the recovery spending was considered to be positive for the environment⁴. There is significant scope to increase this value. Experts also recalled that measures aimed at addressing unsustainable food systems are today underrepresented in the recovery packages, even though food systems can be the biggest barrier to—or enabler of—to a sustainable future.

The EGM discussion covered both the broad systemic changes that are needed, including in capitalism itself, and the specific policies that can have a concrete and targeted impact. Participants found that the world needs to pursue a deep transformation in models of housing, food, mobility and energy, and to work toward decoupling waste generation and the misuse of natural resources from economic and human development.

The concept of a circular economy is gaining traction, and participants agreed that it will be crucial to move away from a fossil fuel-based linear economy toward bio-based circular economies that will not only address climate change but also, by reducing pollution, waste, and the degradation of nature, will improve the health and wellbeing of current and future generations. In this regard, participants highlighted the launch of the [Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency](#) (GACERE), and regional alliances in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Africa, as well as flagged initiatives aimed at the promotion of circular economy through a digital transformation (<https://circulareconomyinternet.com/>).

⁴ <https://greenfiscalpolicy.org/observatory/>

To ensure that these and all efforts, policies and strategies are workable, they must be prepared outside of silos in a more holistic manner. Individual policies—like banning coal and single use plastics—are essential and can be an end in themselves but also entry points to more holistic, systemic change. <https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/resource/15degc-world-requires-circular-and-low-carbon-economy>

The discussion covered various levers and means of implementing the SDGs, including under the following broad categories.

Governance at all levels

Participants acknowledged the fundamental role of clear, evidenced-based policy making at the national and subnational levels, and discussed specific policies that should be enacted like “polluters pay” measures, removing harmful subsidies, progressive carbon taxation and other tax incentives. It was noted that the current cost and incentives structured favour throughput and volumes sold. Clear, uniform regulations, guidance, and access to finance, particularly in support of innovation and upskilling of workers, will be crucial to create an enabling environment for private sector action. For instance, UNIDO’s global Member State consultations on circular economy in May 2021 confirmed that there is broad understanding of circular economy and its benefits within the private sector, and that the business community is energized about new circular economy opportunities along value chains, but they need policy support from government.

It was agreed that once policies are made, implementation, enforcement and accountability mechanisms will be crucial to translate policy into results. The discussion covered several examples of areas where there are policies and regulations in place but progress is limited because there is inadequate implementation and enforcement. Accountability is possible when justice and ethics are cross-cutting issues and corruption is addressed, a fact which highlights the links to SDG 16.

Cities and local governments are natural leaders in some of the necessary transformations, particularly because cities’ high concentration of people can allow shifts in consumption patterns and mobility that can lead the way for the rest of the world. Conceptualizing cities as metabolisms – circulating nutrients and making sure we have the right nutrients at the right places—can help drive creative solutions. Networks of cities, especially those connecting cities from the Global North and Global South, have great potential as mechanisms for sharing good practices, building capacity, and mobilising resources. (e.g. <https://circulars.iclei.org/action-framework/> or the Making Cities Resilient 2030 Campaign). To bolster local action, support with legal, technical, financial and human resources must be given.

At the same time, unsustainable consumption and production and climate change are global challenges that require global solutions, and the active engagement of the multilateral system and increased financial support and investments from governments and the private sector. Participants noted that while individual countries are making progress in “greening” their internal national activities, this often entails exporting the negative externalities to other regions, often in the Global South. The shift to sustainable consumption and production and to circularity needs to be underpinned by strong collaboration across the entire global value chain.

Speakers in the meeting highlighted the fact that governments, businesses, communities, and civil society and international organizations must seek “unusual partnerships” to achieve the SDGs as a whole and SDG 12 and 13 in particular. In this way, SDG 17 is the bedrock of the whole agenda—no one actor or sector can do it alone.

Capacity building, education and communications

Capacity building is a critical means of implementation, and to be effective it must be carried out in a variety of sectors and with diverse approaches. Participants discussed the importance of education and of investing in training for livelihoods in a circular economy and in climate smart and resilience-focused industries. Knowledge of cascading risks and systemic risk should be promoted through capacity building and smart, context-specific communication strategies.

Related to capacity building and education is the need to raise consumer awareness and empowerment. Studies show that consumers are eager to shift their buying patterns but they need more information and education on SCP, and EGM participants posited that consumer information on companies and products will need to be simplified and focused on what is essential for making sustainable choices.

Participants stressed that young people, women, indigenous peoples and others must be empowered as change makers and leaders. Their local realities and cultural assumptions must be taken into account—addressing the cultural issues and stigma about agricultural careers, for instance. Local, traditional and indigenous knowledge should likewise be supported and invested in through capacity building programs.

Data, monitoring and evaluation

High quality, disaggregated data, which illuminates the roles and conditions of women, girls, people with disabilities and others, is critically important. Monitoring, data, analysis and evaluation will be crucial to ensure that policy decisions are the right ones, to understand the nexus between SDG 12 and 13 and across other Goals—and the monitoring frameworks must be specific enough to be meaningful. Data-driven policy making should include a risk analysis, as studies show that risk-blind adaptation may result in maladaptation. Data sharing and multi-stakeholder research should be promoted, and knowledge production models must be inclusive and consider all forms of knowledge, including traditional knowledge and citizen science.

Technology

Participants recognized that digital technology will be central to moving away from unsustainable practices, but that the digital divide must be tackled and all communities, regions and age groups must have access to ICT and internet. Education programs including for older people will help ensure that all can benefit from technology, including those on the margins of society. Solar energy can help power smart phones that will be the lifelines for older people and rural people, and digital technology can link smallholder farmers to markets. At the same time, governments and other decision makers must ensure that technology is context-appropriate, accessible to all, and that e-waste is managed.

Economy and finance

Mobilizing adequate financial resources will be essential. In 2009, the Parties to COP 16 agreed that “developed country Parties commit, in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation, to a goal of mobilizing jointly USD 100 billion per year by 2020 to address the needs of developing countries,” and the Paris Agreement included a reaffirmation of this commitment through 2025. According to the data available through 2018, these commitments have not yet been met, but trends are heading in the right direction.⁵ Financing for renewable

⁵ “Delivering on the \$100 billion Climate Finance Commitment and Transforming Climate Finance,” report by the Independent Expert Group on Climate Finance, December 2020

energy, climate resilience, sustainable land management and conservation agricultural practices are also imperative. Hopeful signs include the fact that fossil fuel subsidies declined in 2019 to \$431.6 billion after two years of rising subsidies, and 2020 also likely saw further declines thanks in part to the lower oil demand and prices during the Covid-19 pandemic. Blended finance approaches hold promise, as does divestment from fossil fuels and investment in other energy sources, with that investment organized around services rather than supply. Participants noted that it is important to redefine how we channel climate finance to end-mile users who are often the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.