

2021 HLPF Thematic Review

Expert Group Meetings

Virtual, 18-20 May 2021

Meeting Summary for Session on SDG 13

1. Introduction

The 2021 Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Sustainable Development Goal 13 (SDG13), “take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts,” was organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). On 19 May 2021, experts from around the world met virtually to share their perspectives and discuss progress, gaps and challenges towards SDG13. It was informed by the Advanced Unedited Version of the 2021 Report of the Secretary-General on Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals.¹

The session was attended by 25 experts from across regions. It opened with keynote remarks by Professor Rajib Shaw of Keio University². Two breakout sessions followed the opening; one focused on mitigation, and one focused on adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR), the proceedings of which were then discussed in a closing plenary. The EGM on SDG13 was moderated by Loretta Hieber-Girardet (UNDRR), and the breakout sessions were moderated by Animesh Kumar (UNDRR) and Lana Zaman (UNDESA).

2. Stocktaking and challenges

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. The United Nations Environmental Programme’s (UNEP) Emissions Gap Report shows that we are not headed where we need to go. A Global Methane Assessment released by the Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC) and UNEP shows an increase in methane despite the overall decrease in emissions. While many country commitments have been made, they must be translated into action and increasingly ambitious at all levels and supported by adequate funding to reach our climate goals, build resilience, and reduce systemic risk.

Governments must tackle climate change as a whole, looking comprehensively at both mitigation and adaptation options, both underscored by disaster risk reduction. The world is fast approaching tipping points that will restrict our possibilities of progress towards sustainable development, adaptation and mitigation, as climate change impacts land, freshwater, and ocean ecosystems. The consequences of ecosystem disruption will extend far beyond the region of their emergence, including by affecting trade, migration, health, and food security. Achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, and the Paris Agreement, is contingent upon our ability to furnish decision makers with risk insights that allow effective pathways to resilience.

¹ Available from

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

² Founder of the Resilience Innovation Knowledge Academy (RIKA), Co-chair of the Asia Pacific Science and Technology Academic Advisory Group (APSTAAG) and Coordinating Lead Author for the Asia chapter of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report

The science is clear – the climate has changed and will continue to change. 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. 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.

Several challenges moving forward were discussed by participants. Heightened levels of vulnerability and exposure that lead to disasters are leading to permanent losses and irreparable damages, and there is an inadequate focus on preventing the creation of new risk, and averting, minimizing, and addressing loss and damages. Risk is increasingly becoming interconnected and cascading in nature, requiring it to be managed at the systems level. There is also insufficient investment in climate action, including risk-informed adaptation - a risk-blind adaptation may result in maladaptation. Where the implications of development policies and programmes across sectors for climate change are not examined nor understood and their potential unintended consequences alleviated, disaster risk across the 2030 Agenda is increasing. Finally, a lack of predictable, adequate and risk-informed finance remains a challenge for the implementation of SDG13, and the cost of inaction is high.

It was pointed that development and inclusiveness go together. Inclusiveness cannot be an add-on but must be located within the DNA of action to achieve SDG 13 and actions must be informed by disaggregated data. Vulnerable and marginalized groups will be disproportionately affected by climate change and disasters, including especially women and girls, but they also must be viewed as agents of change. Focus must be directed towards young people, including young scientists and professionals, to stem innovation and bridge technological gaps. Rights-based approaches to DRR and climate action are critical towards this aim.

Importantly, the challenge of the continuous incorporation of emerging and new projections and understanding of climate change and disaster risk was highlighted. Regarding risk communication, it was underscored that traditional approaches to risk communication must be re-thought, and able to reflect the cascading, compound, and systemic nature of risk. Communication also must be re-strategized to reflect culture.

3. COVID-19 crisis impacts and recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how the impacts of disasters can cascade across sectors and geographies, demonstrating underlying systemic risk across the 2030 Agenda. As climate change increases the frequency and intensity of natural hazards, it too will have impacts across the SDGs. Action towards the implementation of SDG13 as well as embedding considerations for climate change and disaster risk across sectors is therefore critical to the attainment of the 2030 Agenda in its entirety.

Participants discussed the importance of addressing COVID-19 and climate change simultaneously. Embedding climate action and disaster risk reduction within COVID-19 response, recovery, and rehabilitation is thus an opportunity to stimulate the transformation necessary to achieve not only the climate-related goals of the 2030 Agenda, but also to safeguard progress towards its other goals and targets. Such an approach helps us increasing the use of systemic risk information to support resilient development and humanitarian planning, public and private investment, strategic and operational decision-making.

4. Policies and actions to maximize synergies, mitigate trade-offs and drive transformation

Specific interactions between 1) health and climate, 2) climate action, job creation, and a just transition, 3) climate and security, 4) climate and SDG 16 including especially legislation related to climate action and disaster risk reduction, and 5) ecosystems and nature-based solutions for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction across the agenda were discussed. The use of climate change as a lens to address structural inequities and vulnerabilities was highlighted. Increased attention to loss and damage from climate change and circular economic models is necessary moving forward.

Participants identified a need to leverage synergies across sectors and siloes. Actions to maximize synergies by ensuring **policy coherence** discussed by participants included:

- Ensuring climate change, including future climate-related projections, is integrated into national and local DRR strategies and plans, and conversely that risk is fully considered in NAPs and NDCs.
- Identifying links between DRR, climate action and other frameworks, and ensuring that DRR and climate considerations, such the impact of development action on underlying vulnerability and exposure to disaster and global climate change, are incorporated into sectoral plans.
- Reviewing NAPs and NDCs to ensure they contain multi-level components and take an all-of-society approach.

The importance of action at the local level was highlighted, and participants noted that it is often the place where coherence is seen at work. A practical action to further action at the local level mentioned was a stocktaking of tools/methods and network/initiatives campaigns for local climate action being conducted under the Making Cities Resilient 2030 Campaign (MCR2030). To bolster local action, support with legal, technical, financial and human resources must be given.

5. Means of implementation: Mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress

Science-based governance is critical and there is a need to understand the impacts of climate change, including loss and damage. 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. To support and advance the understanding of climate and disaster-related risks necessary to achieve SDG13, and indeed the entire 2030 Agenda, education across disciplines should take climate into consideration, and approach risk as cascading, compound and systemic. It was discussed that innovation and digitization will be key to achieve SDG13.

The investment gap towards SDG 13 must be filled and finance directed towards solutions, including through blended finance and divestment from fossil fuels with investments redirected to other energy sources with a focus on services rather than supply. 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.