

Inputs from OHCHR in response to the invitation to contribute to the report of the Secretary-General entitled: “Towards the achievement of sustainable development: implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through sustainable consumption and production, building on Agenda 21”.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the report of the Secretary- General.

Regarding insights, policy analysis, and recommendations, as well as any analysis or scenario developed in this area, we would like to share following.

With regard to the point B of chapter Two on promoting sustainable consumption patterns for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, building on Agenda 2, we hope that you might find useful OHCHR/ILO Key Messages on human rights and Just Transition, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/climatechange/information-materials/key-messages-hr-a-just-trans.pdf>. In addition, the report of the Special Rapporteur on poverty on “eradicating poverty beyond growth” (A/HRC/56/61) could be considered:

- *Crossing planetary boundaries*
- 11. *Economic growth demands escalating energy and material resource consumption to levels that can no longer be afforded. Unsustainable forms of consumption by certain groups of the population, primarily in rich countries, have pushed the Earth well outside a safe operating space. Six out of the nine planetary boundaries defining Earth stability and life support conducive to human welfare and societal development have already been transgressed.[1] While greenhouse gas emissions causing dangerous climate disruptions and extreme meteorological events are perhaps the most widely publicized, they are not the only environmental pressure imposed on ecosystems. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) recently warned that the extraction of resources had tripled since the mid-1970s, and it expected material extraction to rise by a further 60 per cent by 2060.[2] In its 2019 global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services estimated that, as a result of human activity, 75 per cent of the Earth’s land surface had been significantly altered, 66 per cent of the ocean area was experiencing increasing cumulative impacts, more than 85 per cent of wetlands had been lost, and approximately 1 million species would be facing extinction within decades, unless action was taken to reduce the intensity of drivers of biodiversity loss. Economic growth is a major driver of those trends: “Economic incentives generally have favoured expanding economic activity, and often environmental harm, over conservation or restoration.”[3]*
- 12. *Much hope has been placed on “green growth”, or growth decoupled from environmental pressures thanks to cleaner technologies and more efficient means of production, with reduced use of resources and less waste and pollution. The limits of that approach are now becoming clear, however. In 2019, a systemic review concluded that “there is no empirical evidence supporting the existence of ... an absolute, global, permanent, and sufficiently fast and large decoupling of environmental pressures (both resources and impacts) from economic growth”.[4]*
- 13. *Absolute decoupling is not even occurring at the speed required in the limited area of greenhouse gas emissions (which is only one of the nine planetary boundaries considered). In a review of the performance of 36 OECD countries during the 2013–2019 period, its authors concluded that, while 11 countries managed to achieve absolute decoupling between GDP increases and greenhouse gas emissions during that period, the speed at which that was taking place would fall short of the rates required for those countries to remain within the global carbon budget resulting from the 2015 Paris Agreement, taking into account equity considerations. Based on their decoupling achievements during the period considered, those 11 countries would take 223 years on average to reduce their respective 2022 emissions by 95*

per cent, by the end of which period they would have burned, on average, 27 times their respective remaining post-2022 national “fair shares” of the global carbon budget (if global heating is to remain below 1.5°C) in the process.[5]

- 14. That confirms the conclusions of the Sixth Assessment Report presented in 2022 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noted that, while 23 countries (representing 20 per cent of a total sample of 116 countries) had decoupled consumption-based emissions from GDP during the
- 2015–2018 period – through a combination of outsourcing carbon-intensive production and improvements in production efficiency and energy mix – such decoupling was often short lived, and mostly occurred in countries (mainly from the European Union and North America) with high per capita GDP and high per capita carbon dioxide emissions. Another 67 countries (or 58 per cent), including China and India, had relatively decoupled GDP and consumption-based emissions between 2015 and 2018, reflecting a slower growth in emissions than GDP. A further 19 countries (or 16 per cent), including South Africa and Nepal, experienced no decoupling between GDP and consumption-based emissions from 2015 to 2018. In those countries, a further increase of GDP will likely lead to higher emissions, if they follow the historical trend without substantive improvement in efficiency of production and energy use. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns: “although absolute decoupling has reduced annual emissions [in one fifth of the sample of 116 countries], the remaining emissions are still contributing to an increase in atmospheric carbon concentration. Absolute decoupling is not sufficient to avoid consuming the remaining CO<sub>2</sub> emission budget under the global warming limit of 1.5°C or 2°C and to avoid climate breakdown.”[6]
- 15. Thus, while some decarbonization of the economy is occurring, it is mostly limited to high-income countries with high levels of greenhouse gas emissions per capita, and it is certainly not occurring at the speed required. Similar instances of absolute decoupling are not occurring with regard to other environmental pressures, such as biodiversity loss and resource use. Green growth is not happening. While the adoption of green technologies and circular economy models should be accelerated, they will not, on their own, provide solutions on the scale and at the speed required.

With regard to the point D on Financing for Development, we would like to share the foundational research document for OHCHR’s policy brief on human rights implications of COVID-19 response measures in the context of climate change, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/climatechange/information-materials/foundational-research-doc-ohchrs-policy-brief-hr-implications-covid-19-resonse-measures-in-context-cc.pdf>

With regard to the point E on Strengthening Science-Policy Interface, please find the link to the opinion-editorial by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk appeared in Nature on 2 November 2023, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/opinion-editorial/2023/11/protect-right-science-people-and-planet>. Also, a reference could be made to the SR on toxics and human rights report on the right to science report (A/HRC/48/61):

- 39. The obligation to align government policies with the best available scientific evidence demands that independent science and independent scientists be engaged in informing policy decisions and those processes be established for the review of outdated policy decisions, taking into account the evolving, non-static nature of scientific information.
- 68. At the national level, a common science-policy interface mechanism is the appointment of a chief scientist, or equivalent, who serves as primary adviser to the executive branch, sometimes even serving in the executive cabinet. Increasingly, governmental scientific agencies have been created with the mandate to inform government decision[1]making, and there is increasing reliance on scientific and technical advisory committees to advise legislators or regulators. Such committees can bring a broad range of technical expertise and opinions, and should be selected from recognized, credible experts in their field who are independent and without conflict of interest.

- 69. *At the international level, science-policy interface platforms synthesize and critically evaluate existing scientific knowledge for the benefit of the international community. For example, the science-policy interface is at the core of the functioning of the United Nations Environment Assembly. The scientific assessments of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services contribute critical knowledge to policymakers.*

## **SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production**

Target 12.1 seeks to ‘implement the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, with developed countries taking the lead, in view of huge disparities<sup>1</sup> in consumption and production globally. Target 12.2 which aims to achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources by 2030, places a responsibility on States to control the unsustainable levels of extraction of natural resources domestically. The human right to development, including its key principle of the fair sharing of the benefits (and burdens) of development, include also responsibilities of States toward peoples of other States, and collectively, through international and regional organizations, which become relevant in addressing rights and responsibilities herein.

Other SDG 12 Targets including reducing food wastes and managing hazardous wastes are also integrally linked to the intertwined issues of environment and development and must be addressed fairly to uphold human rights and global justice. The issue of e-waste could also be factored. Target 12.C which aims to rationalize inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption is a ‘means of implementing’ this Goal. This Target is to be achieved by removing market distortions, restructuring taxation and phasing out harmful subsidies, where they exist.

*Implementation of the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns* – Target 12.1 which is to implement the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns<sup>2</sup> envisages multi-stakeholder programmes and partnerships, which develop, replicate and scale up policies and initiatives at all levels.<sup>3</sup> Enforcing the States’ duty to cooperate for the global common good – both people and planet can help to achieve this Target.

*Inequalities in consumption and production should be considered, given the vast inequalities in this regard, within and especially among countries.* It is estimated that the billion richest people consume 72 per cent of the world’s resources, while the 1.2 billion poorest are responsible for only 1 per cent of global consumption.<sup>4</sup> Full implementation of SDG 12 requires both individual and collective action by all States and the international community, notably through international cooperation, including sharing, transfer and access to Science, Technology and Innovation. Redressing inequalities as per SDG 10 and delivering on SDG 17 and the ‘a,b,c Targets’ in all the Goals will be critical, based also on the UNFCCC principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Goal 17 - ‘Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development’ - Targets including finance, science and technology, capacity-building, trade, systemic issues (policy and institutional coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and data monitoring and accountability) are all key, as well as fiscal space, policy space, policy coherence, in advancing on SDG 12 to move towards more equitable and sustainable consumption and production.

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<sup>1</sup> “Changing Consumption and Production Patterns in Developed And Developing Countries Discussed In Commission On Sustainable Development” <19990423>

<sup>2</sup> Consists of six programmes: Sustainable Public Procurement, Consumer Information for SCP, Sustainable Tourism, Sustainable Lifestyles and Education, Sustainable Buildings and Construction, and Sustainable Food Systems

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/resource-efficiency/what-we-do/one-planet-network/10yfp-10-year-framework-programmes>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid n.18