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Session: Advancing human well-being

Contribution from FAO

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Introduction

Advancing human well-being is at the heart of sustainable development and is about upholding human rights and eradicating deprivations across multiple dimensions, closing opportunity gaps and expanding capabilities – including those needed to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences. It is also about safeguarding the natural environment on which everyone depends to ensure the well-being of current and future generations. However, we are falling short on improving all people's lives due to inequalities in opportunities; inadequate access to quality education; persistent gender inequality; unequal access to quality health care and exposure to disease, inadequate access to safe and nutritious food; the consequences of which are laid bare by Covid-19; and insufficient resilience to recover from shocks. Many of the needed transformations to advance human well-being are demonstrably possible, but pathways forward during the decade of action require cooperation, collaboration and dialogue among multiple stakeholders, and employing many levers to ensure no one is left behind, including the most vulnerable.

Guiding questions

- 1. *Policies, actions and trade-offs:* What are some promising actions to support progress toward advancing human well-being and building capabilities? How could these actions be designed to generate synergies with other Goals and Targets? What are some of the possible trade-offs from these actions and how can they be mitigated (see example below)? What are the most critical interventions that will be needed to strengthen human well-being over next 2 years, 5 years, 10 years? What are the interlinkages we can leverage to advance human well-being in the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic? How can national and local systems be strengthened to provide integrated quality, sustainable health and social services to communities in all settings?**

Focusing on the multidimensionality¹ of rural poverty is paramount to achieve not only SDG 1 and SDG 2 but also other SDGs. It is critical to protect the livelihoods and strengthen the capabilities of

¹ Multidimensional poverty goes beyond the concept of income consumption to include multiple deprivations and vulnerabilities at the household and individual level such as health, education, living standards, decent work, gender inequalities, insecurity, powerlessness and injustice.

the poor and vulnerable by promoting inclusive food and agriculture systems that bridge the equity gap in rural development. This also means supporting integrated and targeted policies that account for ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status; addressing structural and intersecting inequalities and facilitating access to productive resources, services, finance and markets for those “furthest behind”.

Successful country action in poverty reduction (e.g. China, Viet Nam, Thailand) shows the fundamental role of addressing inequalities around human capital assets. Universal access to quality education and health services increases the returns on land, animals and labour, which are the main assets of the poor in rural areas.

Other promising synergetic policies toward advancing well-being include social protection². Social protection can facilitate access to credit, relax liquidity constraints and smooth consumption, all of which help vulnerable households manage risk. Linkages with institutional purchases and inclusive value chains can further ensure access to markets and value addition opportunities. Countries like Brazil and Ecuador have successful experiences in developing inclusive value chains and territorial market for agricultural products from small-scale farmers through public procurement and family farming labelling. Demand for local foodstuffs by schools, hospitals, and other public institutions, or by tourism and urban centres are powerful markets conducive to reducing poverty and ensuring the consumption of safe and nutritious food.

Social protection has been a key component of policy responses to guarantee the well-being of rural poor and extreme poor, including rural farmers, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some countries are increasing benefits of existing social protection programmes to rural populations (Malawi, Paraguay and Uruguay); relaxing restrictions on seasonal farm workers to resolve labour shortages, and making receipt of unemployment benefits easier (Germany, Italy); or relaxing taxation for agricultural workers (Uzbekistan) and introducing cheap farm loans and agricultural subsidies (Bangladesh).

The commitment to reducing vulnerability and enhancing the resilience of societies, ecosystems and economies is the common feature and starting point for supporting integrated approaches across climate change adaptation and mitigation, disaster risk reduction and sustainable development programmes³ (UNFCCC, 2017). One good example is the Paraguay GCF PROEZA project supporting the transition to sustainable forest management to reduce forest loss and improve the resilience of poor households to climate change through risk-informed social protection, while combating deforestation and mitigating greenhouse gas emissions.

Other actions to improve well-being come from community-based local systems. The Tuan Tu village in Vietnam is an area with severe climate, frequent droughts and high levels of poverty. However, locals have turned sandy soil into a large-scale asparagus production area throughout the province,

² Social protection consist of a set of policies and programmes that address economic, environmental and social vulnerabilities to food insecurity and poverty, by protecting and promoting livelihoods. Linking shock responsive social protection with early warning systems and disaster risk reduction and management (DRR/M) programmes as well as climate change adaptation and mitigation (CCA/M) initiatives could facilitate the identification of the most vulnerable and accelerate response (FAO.2017b. Social Protection Framework. Available here (<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7016e.pdf>).

³ UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change). 2017. Opportunities and options for integrating climate change adaptation with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. Technical paper by the Secretariat. UNFCCC Secretariat, Bonn, Germany.

with farmers enhancing living standards through the transition of crops and the application of water saving irrigation systems. It is an example of poverty alleviation for ethnic minorities, diversifying and generating sustainable incomes, limiting migration and promoting local development. The cooperatives created have also helped unite people, supporting each other in terms of technology, inputs and local consumption⁴.

Action to strengthen human well-being and capabilities	Synergies with other areas of the 2030 Agenda	Tradeoffs with other areas of the 2030 Agenda
Expanding social protection to rural areas	Reducing vulnerability and reliance on negative coping strategies in the event of shocks – protecting people from potential losses and food insecurity and malnutrition (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 10).	Preventing negative coping strategies should not increase unsustainable agriculture practices. Cash transfer programmes should ensure access to safe and nutritious food to avoid malnutrition practices. When in place, conditionality should not be used as obstacle for purposes intended.
Improve rural infrastructure and targeted services – access to water, education, health and care for young children and the elderly	Improve access to education and basic services; support better integration in labor opportunities and participation in the development process, including for women (SDGs 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10).	Improved coverage of essential services and infrastructure must not be at the expense of the quality of the service. Ensuring quality of education and healthcare is key. With regards to indigenous peoples, services and basic infrastructure have to respect territories and traditional knowledge.
Combining resources management measures with social safety nets	Ensuring sustainable management of natural resources (including fisheries) while guarantying minimum salary and food security and nutrition during closed seasons (SDGs1, 2, 14, 15).	Incentive to access economic benefit could lead to increase the number of fishers and agricultural producers, increasing pressure on resources in a given area.
Incentivizing the demand for local foodstuffs by public schools, hospitals,	Development of inclusive value chains and territorial markets for agricultural products from small-	Potential to increase malnutrition if nutrition-sensitive social protection plan is not in place to

⁴ See: *FAO & Centre for Agricultural Policy (2018), Climate Change, Disaster and Poverty Nexus in Vietnam. Box 3-7.*

and other public institutions, or by tourism and urban centers	scale producers, including through the use of mechanisms such as public procurement and organic family farming (SDGs 1, 2, 4, 11, 12, 13).	prioritize food supply and consider the micronutrient requirements of a healthy diet and human health. Public procurement should ensure both the supply but also the demand of the public institutions to avoid food waste and loss of income of smallholders.
Promotion of green jobs in agricultural sectors and its value chains with focus on youth	Reduction of unemployment in rural areas, address climate change and natural resource degradation, ultimately strengthening resilience and livelihoods. (SDGs 1, 2, 8, 12, 13, 14).	People escaping from poverty and hunger may consume more energy or land and thus increase emissions.

2. Leaving no-one behind: Which groups are especially vulnerable to poverty and lack access to capability enhancing services like quality education, health care and clean water and sanitation and what are ways to ensure that actions leave no one behind? How can legal reforms, shifts in social norms, and changes in economic and social policies be applied to produce tangible shifts towards greater equality, particularly by prioritizing the rights of the poorest and most marginalized populations? How do we overcome barriers and allocate resources to unlock the potential of young people and women, and empower marginalized groups, including migrants and refugees? Is there new evidence from the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups that can help inform tailored policy interventions?

Over 2 billion people in the world still live in poverty today. About 736 million people live in extreme poverty, while hunger still affects more than 820 million people. The recent years' economic slowdowns, conflicts and climate-change related events were already hampering the possibility to achieve SDG1 by 2030. High rates of inequality further undermine the achievement of SDG1⁵ and it is estimated that the COVID-19 pandemic will further exacerbate this scenario, pushing about 40 to 60 million people into extreme poverty^{6,7,8}.

⁵ FAO, 2020: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca8843en/CA8843EN.pdf>

⁶ World Bank, 2019: https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/impact-covid-19-coronavirus-global-poverty-why-sub-saharan-africa-might-be-region-hardest?cid=ECR_LI_worldbank_EN_EXT

⁷ FAO, 2020. *COVID-19 and rural poverty: Supporting and protecting the rural poor in times of pandemic*. Rome. <http://www.fao.org/3/ca8824en/CA8824EN.pdf>

⁸ FAO, 2020. *Addressing inequality in times of COVID-19*. Rome. <http://www.fao.org/3/ca8843en/CA8843EN.pdf>

To Leave No One Behind (LNOB) it is key to focus development efforts in rural areas, home to 80% of the extreme poor and central to almost 70% of the interventions called for by SDG targets (FAO, 2019)⁹. The extreme poor face overlapping inequalities in access to income, natural resources, health, education, decent employment, social protection and public services¹⁰. They are also the most vulnerable to food price volatility and the most dependent on agricultural activities and access to natural resources and biodiversity for their food security and livelihoods. Around 40 percent of the inequality in low- and lower-middle-income countries is due to the gap in living standards between rural and urban populations (SOFI, 2019). Of the 385 million children living in extreme poverty in 2013, more than four out of five lived in rural areas (UNICEF, 2019) and about 71% of all child labour is concentrated in the agricultural sector.

Four key policy areas are critical to LNOB: ensuring food security and nutrition; promoting economic inclusion; fostering environmentally sustainable and resilient livelihoods; and preparing and protecting the extreme poor against risks and shocks¹¹. Multisectoral coordination is paramount for effective policy design and efficient resource allocation.

3. *Knowledge gaps: Where are the science, knowledge and data gaps that need to be filled for better understanding of the interlinkages among SDGs in strengthening human well-being? Where are the knowledge gaps around identifying those who are most at risk of being left behind? What knowledge is lacking to identify and remove structural barriers to building human capabilities, including for the most vulnerable and marginalized? How can these be filled? How can we fully leverage and exploit existing knowledge and science to advance human well-being?*

The implementation of poverty reduction strategies at national and sub-national levels requires knowledge on the specificities of rural areas. While poverty measures exist, including for both monetary and multidimensional poverty, harmonized information and data on national and global rural poverty are less readily available and data disaggregation for rural areas, across agroecological and population characteristics is important. Beyond poverty statistics, systematically collected administrative data of rural populations is often lacking.

A significant contributor to improved human well-being is the adoption of place-based approaches (or territorial approaches) which are often adaptive, participatory solutions that consider local institutional capacities, agroecosystems and landscape management, and can contribute to improved understanding of the historical and structural factors shaping opportunities for equity, food and nutrition security and poverty reduction.

⁹ Trivelli, C., y Berdegué, J.A., 2019. Transformación rural. Pensando el futuro de América Latina y el Caribe. 2030 - Alimentación, agricultura y desarrollo rural en América Latina y el Caribe, No. 1. Santiago de Chile. FAO. 76p. (available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5508es/ca5508es.pdf>).

¹⁰ Access in electricity varies from 73.4 percent in urban areas in Mozambique to 2.2 percent in rural areas¹⁰; in Colombia, 72.8 percent of urban population have basic handwashing facilities including soap and water, against 34.8 percent in rural areas (World Bank Data, 2017).

¹¹ Rural Extreme Poverty. Framework of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) : <http://www.fao.org/3/ca4811en/ca4811en.pdf>

- 4. *Relevant means of implementation and the global partnership for development (SDG 17):* Achieving the 2030 Agenda relies on applying the means of implementation to harness synergies and/or reduce trade-offs. Are there examples of how the various means of implementation, including finance, partnerships, capacity building, and science and technology (also see below), are being brought together to accelerate and achieve these objectives at scale? Can these be replicated or adjusted to fit other contexts? How can multi-stakeholder partnerships that support integrated responses to the needs of marginalized populations be adopted for greatest impact? What are the most important partnerships that will be needed to enhance human wellbeing over the next 2 years, 5 years, 10 years?**

Different types of partnerships showcase the added value of joining efforts, resources (financial, in-kind, human, etc.), expertise and technical capacities, for example:

1. The Global Network Against Food Crises (GNAFC) is a partnership that brings together development and humanitarian actors, including UN Organizations such as FAO, WFP, UNICEF and others, to respond to food crises worldwide including through anticipatory action. It reflects a shared understanding that acting separately in common settings would result in overlapping and wasted resources.
2. The Multi-Stakeholder Platforms for the Voluntary Guidelines for Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Forests and Fisheries (VGGT) is a proven and effective, participatory process for a dialogue mechanism. It represents an entry point to foster effective land governance at national and local level, support land tenure reforms, and involve many public and private actors operating along food-supply chains. The model has been identified in SDG 17 as a central tool in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
3. The Hand-in-Hand Initiative is an evidence-based, country-owned and country-led initiative to accelerate efforts toward achieving SDG 1 and SDG 2 through agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development. The initiative provides a matchmaking platform for governments, development partners and civil society to identify opportunities, challenges and investment gaps and mobilize resources to address the needs and seize opportunities. It uses the most sophisticated tools available, including advanced geo-spatial modelling and analytics, to identify the biggest opportunities to raise the incomes and reduce the inequities and vulnerabilities of the rural populations that constitute the vast majority of the world's poor.
4. The tripartite project co-led and co-funded by the Government of Colombia, the EU and FAO being implemented with a focus on rural development by developing sustainable value chains, access to markets, strengthening small-holder agriculture and reducing rural poverty.

As crises are becoming more complex, and considering the existing and new challenges to sustainable development such as the socio-economic ones related to COVID-19, creating new partnerships and strengthening existing ones in the next two, five or ten years is crucial. These partnerships must align with the SDGs and the national development agendas of countries.

- 5. *Science, technology and innovation:* The ways we eat, live and work are defined to various extents by science, technology and innovation, and achieving sustainability in all these areas will require**

STI-based solutions, which are applied in an ethical manner and respect human rights. How can we create and scale up STI solutions to strengthen human well-being in sustainable ways, and to promote improved capabilities and build resilience?

- a. What role will STI play in this transformation to a sustainable system of building human well-being? What are the most promising technological solutions? What are potential trade-offs and synergies to keep in mind in this context, including in terms of ensuring that technological applications, such as Artificial Intelligence, adhere to human rights and ethical standards?**

Innovation is key to overcoming challenges and achieving sustainable development but access to STI is not a given for many (especially the rural poor and disadvantaged populations), and technology does not always respond to local needs. To be effective and reach the “last mile”, we need empowered communities that can lead or contribute to the implementation and adaptation of innovative processes for specific needs.

Digitalization can greatly improve access to STI. In agriculture, for example, direct face-to-face advisory services are increasingly being complemented by modern communication technologies, digital tools and Artificial Intelligence. Yet, more work is needed in order to make the use of STI inclusive, including: reducing associated risks and increasing the benefits of digital technologies; assisting smallholder family farmers and rural populations in strengthening their digital literacy; and creating enabling inclusive policy and institutional mechanisms within the concept of leaving no one behind.

- b. How can STI help improve capabilities and build resilience, in both developing and developed countries?**

To improve capabilities and build resilience of rural people and communities, science and technology needs to be more participatory, promoting co-creation of innovation and technologies, participatory research and demonstration and joint learning. People and communities are resilient when they are supported by a conducive environment that supports them in unlocking their full potential to innovate. More importantly, institutional and social innovations are essential to creating environments where STI can have high impact. Governments have a decisive role to play ensuring relevant and inclusive processes, and making sure that STI are available and affordable to smallholder farmers, especially those in remote areas, vulnerable groups, and women. Reaching the isolated and delivering at the last mile should be the new mission to LNOB.

Digitalizing agricultural payments can offer opportunities to increase account ownership as well as create a credit history for farmers. About 235 million unbanked adults in developing countries receive agricultural payments in cash.¹² Digitizing payments, particularly through mobile phones, could cut the number of unbanked adults by up to a quarter or more in countries like Mozambique, Nigeria, and Vietnam, by roughly a third in Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone, and by up to half or more in Ethiopia.

¹² Ibid.

c. How can (homegrown) community innovations be leveraged and shared to inspire and accelerate local creative solutions and action?

Co-creation of innovations and local innovations are extremely important.

Government policies and institutions should be set up to overcome disconnect between formal and informal STI to facilitate co-benefits of local knowledge and innovation, indigenous knowledge and innovation as well as formal STI.