"Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development ".

Louise McLeod, VP Advocacy & Education
Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

The High Level Political Forum (HLPF) annual meeting is the core United Nations platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. In the 2020 HLPF (held virtually due to Covid-19), participants debated where we stand on the SDGs in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and reflected on how the international community can respond to the pandemic in a way that will put us back on track to achieve the SDGs and accelerate progress during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development. 47 countries carried out voluntary national reviews (VNRs) of their implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the 2020 HLPF from Friday, 10 July to Thursday, 16 July 2020.

Ministerial Declaration (Outcome document)
The President of ECOSOC appointed H.E. Mr. Georgi Velikov Panayotov, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the UN, and H.E. Ms. Amal Mudallali, Ambassador Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the UN to facilitate the intergovernmental negotiations of the Ministerial Declaration.¹

Summary of the President of ECOSOC
The President of ECOSOC will also prepare a summary to capture the key messages of the discussions. To be issued as of 08.01.2020.

Background / Summary Note²
Impact of COVID-19 on the SDGs

Much of the Forum’s attention was thus dedicated to the impact of COVID-19 on the SDGs. The discussions showed countries’ commitment to a multilateral response to COVID-19 and their determination to continue to forge ahead with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. A key message was that the response to COVID-19 should kick off the major changes we need in order to realize the

¹ Draft Outline of the Ministerial Declaration (27 April 2020)
² https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26767Note_on_2020_HLPF.pdf
2030 Agenda and the SDGs. [The meeting brought together the Prime Ministers of Norway and India, over 100 Ministers and Vice-Ministers as well as hundreds of policy makers from around the world, along with Members of Parliament, NGOs, think tanks, academia and the business sector.]

“The event started on a sobering note: the pandemic risks reversing decades of progress on poverty and hunger and places even greater obstacles on the way to many SDGs. The SDG Progress Chart 2020 by UN DESA already shows that poverty is on the rise for the first time in decades; hunger continues to increase; many people don’t have access to safe drinking water or sanitation services; inequalities are on the rise and so is the number of people living in slums. Terrestrial and marine biodiversity is threatened and a large number of species face extinction.

“The SDGs are the world’s guidepost to build back better At the same time, the HLPF presented a more optimistic message: the recovery from the pandemic can provide a window of opportunity to realize the structural changes that will lead to realizing the SDGs and delivering effective climate action. For this to happen, the SDGs need to be the world’s guidepost to “build back better and greener”.

“Another motto of the discussion was that no one must be left behind: the pandemic affects more dramatically certain groups in society and women and girls as well as countries in special situations, such as least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, and small island developing States. Participants discussed solutions to resume and accelerate progress towards the SDGs. Those include building more resilient, sustainable and nutritious food systems; improving human well being across the board; enhancing access to energy; as well as using science and technology to combat inequalities and decouple economic growth from natural resource use. Much attention was paid to the need to mobilize more financial resources and address challenges relating to debt for the countries particularly affected by COVID-19. All agreed that we need global, national and local actions engaging all groups in society.”

Resources

Links to Referenced Documents

Political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly
https://undocs.org/A/RES/74/4
UN Secretary General Report on the SDGS 2019

Background Documents

- Letter by the President of ECOSOC on the draft Ministerial Declaration of the 2020 HLPF/High-level Segment of ECOSOC under silence procedure (17 July)
- Draft Ministerial Declaration of the 2020 HLPF/High-level Segment of ECOSOC (17 July)
- Letter by the co-facilitators on sharing the revised draft of the Ministerial Declaration of the 2020 HLPF/High-level Segment of ECOSOC (28 June 2020)
Getting the SDGs Back on Track

Before the pandemic, progress had been uneven. Although gains were being made in certain areas, progress has stalled or even been reversed in many areas including food security, climate change and increased inequalities. The covid-19 pandemic has impacted all the SDGs and revealed an exacerbated existing system of inequalities and created an unprecedented crisis with overwhelmed health facilities, school cancellations and businesses forced to close.

Critical to the acceleration of the SDGs are international and national cooperation, dialogue among countries, multiple stakeholders (including NGOs such as GWI) and regions. At the geopolitical level, the crisis calls for leadership, global solidarity, transparency, trust and multilateral cooperation.

COVID-19 is not only a threat to our health, but a human crisis of multiple dimensions.

Key words and phrases heard throughout all sessions to keep in mind:

- Multi-stakeholder: Vulnerability, sustainability, uncertainty, urgency, inequity
- Building Back Better: resiliency, trust, leadership, cooperation/collaboration, sustainability, preparedness
- Leaving no one behind: sustainability and inclusivity, digital technology for all

Multi-Stakeholder

VULNERABILITY

The poorest and the most vulnerable people most affected by the pandemic include women and girls, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees, persons in situation of conflict,
informal sector workers and other groups. Women and children are bearing the hardest brunt as the pandemic affects informal sector workers, half of the global workforce. Gender-based violence (GBV) has surged.

Fragile health systems and limited financial and other resources make low income countries extremely vulnerable to external forces. However, many middle-income countries are equally as vulnerable as they were the first countries hardest hit due to the lockdown and the subsequent drop in tourism. Middle income countries are also the largest repositories of the world’s poorest populations.

The transformations needed to realize the 2030 require strong institutions and integrated, evidence- and data-based policies, international and national cooperation and dialogue among countries, multiple stakeholders and regions.

**UNCERTAINTY**
Uncertainly for the future stresses the need to think about risk and resilience.

**INEQUITY**
Covid-19 is hitting the most vulnerable populations. The World Bank estimates than an additional 70 m. people will fall below the poverty line. When there is no economic growth, there is a greater need to focus on *inequality* because the gap between the haves and the have nots widens.

**URGENCY**
What we do in the next 6 to 18 months is critical and will shape how the next economic decade unfolds.

**SUSTAINABILITY**
When we build back better, we have to build back *sustainably* concentrating on providing resources, reducing (not implementing) austerity measures and creating new infrastructure.

**TRUST**
Trust means restoring trust between governments and between governments and their citizens bringing the different sectors together... government, civil society, private sector.

**RESILIENCE**
Unless we build systems with resilience, vulnerability with continue to dominate us. *The resilience of all of us depends on the most vulnerable on having resilience... we are ALL vulnerable.*

**SDG 4 (Education)**

**Digital Technologies and Learning**

GWI must look to encouraging the use of all forms of digital technologies and infrastructure for education. In 2011 the UN declared access to the Internet as a Human Right. As the demand for digital skills has grown exponentially governments must put into place the infrastructure for...
training across all sectors and all levels of education. As of 2020, 3.6 B people are still totally offline as more than 40% of the world population does not have internet access.

**Points to Ponder**

- A universal recognition is needed for a strong digital infrastructure ensuring that all young people have access to online learning and the need for closing the gap in the technological divide, nurturing ITC skills to improve the power of digital and equip the younger generation with the needed skills for the future.\(^4\) Without adequate ITC skills, marginalized groups will be further marginalized as the gap widens. Digital inequalities often reflect societies’ inequalities. ICT skills for entrepreneurial women and women empowerment training – training hairdressers and market women who had never seen computers before – is more critical than ever.

- As a result of Covid-19, remote learning and remote teaching are most needed now when schools and workplaces are closed meaning that reliable and inexpensive connectivity is required especially in remote places.

- Young people place more trust in the digital world when learning.

- There is a need to “train the trainer” and teach people how to train others, a great challenge during Covid-19.

- There is a crucial need for ITC skills and the benefits thereof especially amongst low income countries and marginalized populations. In 40 of 84 countries less than half the population possesses basic computer skills such as copying and pasting or sending an email with an attachment.

- Governmental policies are needed that look at comprehensive skills assessment to determine what skills are needed on a country by country basis.

- More people worldwide use the internet on their mobile devices to achieve their goals than any other devices. Even if wired internet is available, people still rely heavily on their personal mobile devices to continue with their work both inside and outside the workplace.

- Delivery of services such as health service, passport services, birth and death registry, digital property addressing system, national information contact centers, emergency call centers etc are all possible on mobile devices. Digital skills and capacities are critical for development to bridge the digital gap between the served and unserved communities and the provision of universal access and service.

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We need more access and devices especially for all persons especially those with disabilities and other vulnerable populations who will need special devices.

If we are truly to leave no one behind the power of broadband must be put in reach of all to ‘build back better addressing the 4 I’s: infrastructure, investment, innovation, inequality.

500 million students do not have the connectivity for access to national education programs.

The New “Normal” in Education

SAVE OUR FUTURE is the slogan for a new campaign designed to transform education during the pandemic. When children are out of school they lose not weeks and months, but years of education because they basic learning skills are jeopardized. We cannot afford education to be the loser... development aid for education is already too low. The new education agenda includes safe schools (social distancing and sanitation); connected schools requiring a technology revolution, high technology and high-tech schools working with technology; community support, centers of nutrition, mutual support for girls.

Middle income countries have the highest numbers of children out of school as well as large numbers of migrant children.

10T dollars is the amount that will be lost to the economy for the future in this generation. The pandemic is the largest shock to education than at any time in history: school closures == loss of economy. The magnitude of this shock on our children has not yet been maximized. The share of children who do not already meet minimum standards will go up an extra 7m as more students will drop out, especially girls. This will reduce the annual earnings by 16m $ throughout their lifetimes.

Lost learning for children and youth and school closures lead to other challenges such as socio-psycho support and nutrition. We are at risk of losing 20 years of progress for education for girls – pregnancies and early child marriage will increase and many of them will not return to school.

Education is a basic human right and should be available to all.

Education should not be seen as just a cost. ALL means ALL.

Covid-19 has served as a wake-up call to connect the billions of people who are still off line as an utmost emergency.

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5 UNESCO | SDG-Education Steering Committee, Group of Friends for Education (Permanent Missions of Argentina, Czech Republic, Japan, Kenya and Norway)
SDG 5 (Gender Equality)

SDG 5.3 – Elimination of harmful practices such as early childhood marriage and FGM

An estimated 3.9 million girls are at risk of undergoing FGM globally every year and more than 200 million women and girls alive today have undergone FGM. In spite of all efforts made by various countries to end FGM by adopting various laws and policies criminalizing the practice, FGM remains widespread.

FGM is not limited to the African continent. In March 2020, Equality Now, the End FGM European Network and the U.S. End FGM/C Network, launched a report demonstrating that FGM was a global issue that was present in all continents except Antarctica. At least 92 countries across the globe have addressed FGM but only 32 countries collect any real data. Many countries such as India still ignore the fact that FGM is still being practised and governments in general lack any political will to take any action to eliminate FGM. And where there are policies and laws many communities try to find ways to avoid penalties and continue the practice.

What will it take to create action?

1. Filling the data gaps because the lack of sufficient data allows governments to ignore the issue. For example, according to the government of India, FGM does not exist. Government officials denied that it was being practised because there is NO data. It doesn’t matter that hundreds of women from across India have provided anecdotal evidence. How do you pressure a government that has no official data? International funding barely reaches India because it is not recognized as a problem.

2. A focus on the harmful health aspect of FGM and the root cause of inequalities including definitions of terms. All forms of FGM is harmful and should be recognized as such by governments but there is an underlying agreement that what is considered to be ‘harmful’ and is OK if conducted by medical personnel. Some governments believe that it is not really amputation but is merely on the level of circumcision.

6 From global to local- Using legal advocacy pathways to accelerate SDG 5.3 at the national level

Speakers:
Bernadette Loloju - CEO, Anti FGM Board, Kenya
Masooma Ranalvi - Co-Founder and India Lead, We Speak Out
Dr. Jacinta Muteshi Strachan - Formerly Population Council
Mackins Pajibo - Women Solidarity Inc., Liberia
Divya Srinivasan - Human Rights Lawyer, Equality Now

Moderators:
Felister Gitonga, Programme Officer, End Harmful Practices, Equality Now
Flavia Mwangovya - Global Lead, End Harmful Practices, Equality Now
3. Support from religious leaders and comprehensive community engagement with both men and women. FGM is prevalent among Roman Catholics as well as the Muslim population.

4. Quality professional health services to meet the needs of girls and provide intervention. In Kenya, younger women do not believe in FGM as opposed to the older age groups although in some cultures it is still considered to be a right of passage. Alternative practices need to be considered.

5. Media – social and mainstream media reaching out with effective messaging.

Without government support, elimination of FGM will be almost impossible although increased responsibility falls to the international community and activists especially in those areas where there is no government support. Pressure needs to be brough to bear an urge national action plans even through FGM is rooted in society and tradition. Pushing laws against traditions is difficult.

Ending FGM is everybody’s responsibility. Where is it practiced? On whom? Why? What social changes are needed? What community leaders are influential in making change happen?

**IMAGINE A POST-COVID-19 CITY with Women’s Human Rights**

International Alliance of Women, Feminist and Women's Movement Action Plan, NGO CSW/NY, Habitat (TBC) and UN Women (TBC): imagine a post COVID-19 city that respects women’s human rights, builds resilience and prevents crises, and puts feminist and women’s movements’ aspirations into local action.

In a Post-covid world can we build sustainable systems where 75% of the world’s population live in cities? What does a city that meets the needs of all ages, races, gender etc. look like? A full-scale investment in community and collective care is badly needed along with better physical spaces for social protection.  

**Lessons from early response to the pandemic (urban planner and former mayor)**

- There is a challenge of leadership since women and girls are the most affected by policies made on their behalf. Globally, it is the mayors who deliver essential services.

- A city planned for women is a city planned for all. Since women work in every aspect of the community... caregiving, raising children, working... everything should be within 15 minutes distance by walking (schools, jobs etc.)

- We need to look at a holistic and integrated way of planning with leadership at the local and even the committee level to look at everything as an ecosystem (public private partnership – PPP) in order to get sustainable development in cities.

- Establish trust.

- We need more women to share their lessons learned and experiences. Women’s leadership begins at the local level. We have seen significant differences in countries led by women during covid-19 that have moved forward.

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7 27% of women in NYC are food insecure.

8 Rick Smith / Maimunah Mohd Sharif (Undersecretary of the UN, UN Habitat)
Even in liberal democracies there is a tendency to use crises (such as covid) to exploit people and decrease democratic processes. What is needed is a feminist economic recovery plan. Rather than just focusing on creating jobs we need to be focused on a transition from work to home.

- A universal basic income (UBI) is key to women’s survival
- We need a release from harmful industries such as tourism and the rampant growth of land development.
- Police are wrongly relied on for intervention in domestic violence.

What does a feminist post-covid vision look like? It is not much different than what we have always envisioned but now it is critical that the impossible become necessary – health coverage, paid family leave, relief of student debt.

9 Khara Jabola-Carolus (Hawaii) Status of Women Commission (the oldest in the U.S.) She gave her presentation while breastfeeding.
How is Covid-19 affecting GWI and its NFAs?

COVID-19 is likely to have a profound effect on progress towards the sustainable development goals pushing tens of millions of people back into extreme poverty and hunger, impacting the livelihoods of half of the global workforce due to unemployment or underemployment at a time when we were still not on track to achieve the SDGs by 2030.¹⁰

Questions GWI must ask:

- How does GWI respond to the impacts of COVID-19 in order to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs especially those that are covered in our mission of education and gender equality (SDGs 4 and 5)?
- How do we ensure that ‘no one gets left behind’?
- How do we encourage our NFAs to elicit adequate responses from our governments and policy-makers, the private sector, academia and civil society to ‘build back better’?

Charting the New “Normal” in Education¹¹

COVID-19 promotes that the ‘new normal’ in education must be more transformative if we are to illicit changes in human behavior, including our relationship with nature, and be more inclusive and more equitable. To put SDG4 and education back on course, we must:

- Capitalize on lessons learned during the covid-19 crisis;
- Demonstrate the centrality of education to drive recovery and build more sustainable and resilient societies;
- Call for political championing, alliances across sectors and societal engagement to act differently and better to leave no child, youth or adult behind. We need to engage everyone – government, youths, civil society, teachers – in order to chart a new future of education.
- Find more imaginative ways to use resources. We must re-imagine education differently and we are as yet underestimating the changes that need to be made. Investments made right now can

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¹⁰ 2020 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF 2020), 1st meeting

Launching the decade of action at a time of crisis: Keeping the focus on the SDGs while combatting Covid-19

¹¹ UNESCO | SDG-Education Steering Committee, Group of Friends for Education (Permanent Missions of Argentina, Czech Republic, Japan, Kenya and Norway)
serve as a launch pad along with the transfer education from school to home. Parents must understand they can play a lead role even though while in school, teachers are better trained.

- Transformation rather than improvement is the key.

Call to Action:

GWI and its NFAs must call on our governments to trust the professionalism of teachers and medical personnel if we are to safely re-open our schools.

Global Socio-Economic Considerations and Social Protection

Broader efforts are needed to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, with a focus on protecting people, targeting the poorest and most vulnerable, using the SDGs as our compass. The pandemic will trigger a 60% decline in GDP.12

Knowledge is power. Half of the world that wakes up every morning to go to work: the young girls who gets up before dawn to find food and water for her siblings, women who risk their own health to earn an income in order to feed her family tomorrow. These are the several billion of the world’s population who will suffer the most. As many as 60% of a country’s population work in the informal sector with no social protection (mostly women). They are not a liability but an essential component for the economy.

How do we flatten the curve and survive the socio-economic crisis and come out stronger? Right now some governments are expanding social protection mechanisms; individuals are taking selfless action in hospitals and food supply centers.

How costly is it for millions of people to live without sufficient health care and only have spotty access to social protection? The health crisis leads to social economic crisis. The two are inextricably linked and must be considered in policy decisions.

12 Speakers
Mr. Achim Steiner, Administrator, United Nations Development Programme
Ms. Cina Lawson, Minister of Postal Affairs and Digital Economy of Togo
Ms. Yemi Alade, Nigerian singer and advocate for UNDP
Ms. Reema Nanavaty, Director General of SEWA (Self Employed Women’s Association), India
What is the reality?

- Covid-19 is exacting a very destructive force on the income in most households. 73% will need food support if the current situation carries on.
- Children who have just started school are facing a setback and many girls have and will continue to drop out of school.
- GBV is on the rise.

At the grassroots level and in spite of suffering, women are willing to take on new challenges without expecting help from society or the governments. In India, for example, vegetable vendors started using electric bicycles to deliver food leading to microenterprises between the vegetable vendors and suppliers, resellers and their own networks of distribution.

We can’t afford NOT to have a basic income. Universal social protection is not possible without universal basic income and support where every individual would be paid a modest cash transfer each month without a means test. Pilot programmes in Africa /India /Canada have proven to be successful. Fundamentally is ethical, a matter of common justice, freedom and for the public good. We need to build a system that protects dignity in which we can build a better society.

We are experiencing an economic crisis with the pandemic as the trigger. The income distribution system in the 20th century has broken down. If people have basic income their mental and physical health improves. Their productive work improves. Basic education for their children improves and once introduced, will produce a domino effect. Unless we build a system of resilience, vulnerability will continue to dominate us, all of us.

_The resilience of all of us depends on the most vulnerable on having resilience... we are ALL vulnerable._

Article found: https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/interview/standing-every-country-can-afford-universal-basic-income/

_Human development is poised to decline 20% for the first time in recent history._

___Submitted by:___

_Louise McLeod, GWI VP Advocacy and Education_

_17 August 2020_
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