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

Input on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat hereby transmits the input on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, prepared by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

* E/HLPF/2020/1.



Input on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean

[Original: Spanish]

Summary

The fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, which was to be held in Havana from 28 to 31 March 2020 and chaired by the Government of Cuba, had to be postponed owing to the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

The world is facing a humanitarian and health crisis without precedent in the past century. This pandemic has battered a global economy already weakened by slow growth and growing inequality. As uncertainty grows over the likely intensity and duration of the pandemic, economies and societies are shutting down and coming to a standstill. The short- and even medium-term effects may be devastating.

In this context, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals are more relevant than ever for advancing towards a new development model capable of eradicating extreme poverty, generating quality jobs, ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages, and tackling the climate crisis without leaving anyone behind.

To continue to pursue these efforts in the region, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has contributed through a series of actions that include knowledge platforms, documents and virtual meetings, which are outlined below.

I. Portal for the Sustainable Development Goals in Latin America and the Caribbean (Sustainable Development Goal Gateway)¹

1. The Sustainable Development Goal portal (Sustainable Development Goal Gateway) is a platform developed collaboratively by the United Nations system at the regional level, in response to the second and fourth recommendations on the long-term restructuring of regional assets that are set forth in the report of the Secretary-General² and concern the establishment of strong knowledge management hubs (second recommendation) and a region-by-region change management process that will seek to consolidate existing capacities with regard to data and statistics (fourth recommendation).

2. The Sustainable Development Goal Gateway, an inter-agency regional knowledge platform on the Sustainable Development Goals, was developed as an input for the fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, which was to be held in March 2020. The platform, which was produced with input from all the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean, was presented to the States members of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) at the thirty-fourth session of the Committee of the Whole, held in New York in October 2019,³ to the Deputy Secretary-General and the regional directors of United Nations entities with a presence in the region in March 2020, and to the permanent representatives of the 33 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on 15 May 2020 at a virtual meeting in preparation for the operational activities for development segment of the Economic and Social Council.

3. Available in English and Spanish, the platform is an entry point to all the information on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals in the region. It allows countries – and United Nations country teams – to seek expertise to respond to national needs related to the 2030 Agenda. It also facilitates statistical follow-up to the progress towards all the Goals at the regional and country levels and fosters cooperation and collaboration across the entire United Nations system at the regional and global levels.

4. The portal contains more than 1,500 information sources from United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in the region. In terms of statistical information, it contains a database of Sustainable Development Goal indicators, including those prioritized for the region, with links to more than 50 statistical databases of custodian agencies in the system, in addition to links to national databases and portals. It also contains a description of each Goal and the respective indicators, and regional and national information. The section on countries includes the voluntary national reviews that have been submitted, as well as links to the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office and the United Nations system in each country and to official national statistics. The section on statistics has six subsections with comprehensive national, regional and global information, including information on the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators and the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

¹ <https://agenda2030lac.org/en>.

² Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, 2019 (A/74/73-E/2019/14), New York, 2019.

³ LC/PLEN.34/5, available at https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45264/S2000214_en.pdf?sequence=1.

II. Document: *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the new global and regional context: scenarios and projections in the current crisis*⁴

5. This document gives an overview of the main economic, social and environmental trends globally and regionally that influence the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in Latin America and the Caribbean and offers a prospective analysis of progress towards the related targets on the basis of 72 statistical series of Sustainable Development Goal indicators in the region. It simulates scenarios in 2030 in three crucial areas: unemployment, extreme poverty and greenhouse gas emissions. It concludes with an evaluation of the risks to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the region. All the analyses cover the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as far as possible with the information available in the last week of March 2020, with the caveat that the short- and medium-term predictions should be interpreted with caution given the uncertainty over the behaviour of economic and social variables.

6. The conclusion of the review is that the comprehensive spirit of the 2030 Agenda is under threat because, although a few targets have been achieved, many can be attained only with significant policy interventions, and others appear to be unattainable. More than 70 per cent of the indicators analysed show that the region will require public policy intervention, in some cases significant public policy intervention, to achieve the threshold established by the target.

7. The data examined in the document show that the international context and the situation in Latin America and the Caribbean have made it more difficult to advance towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The world that existed in 2015, when the 2030 Agenda was adopted, now seems far away. In the current international context, the slowdown in economic growth, growing inequality and the weak response to the environmental emergency have led to a significant resurgence in protectionist tendencies and extreme nationalist positions and weaker multilateral institutions and rules. The gap between society's demands and the effectiveness of the institutional response is widening, as can be seen very clearly in the environmental debate, for example in the unambitious outcomes of the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. More recently, almost all the responses to the pandemic have been solely national or local in scope, even within blocs characterized by advanced economic and social integration, such as the European Union. The lack of a vision that transcends national boundaries has precluded multilateral action and demonstrated the very limited reach of international solidarity.

8. In an uncertain world, in which there is little inclination towards international cooperation, the weak and uneven progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and the response to the pandemic, show that the countries of the region have yet to respond with the force and speed required by global developments.

9. To respond to the current situation, ECLAC proposes that the following set of closely related measures be implemented:

- Coordinate a powerful fiscal stimulus at the international level to support health services and to protect jobs and the income of people in general

⁴ LC/PUB.2020/5, available at https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45338/4/S2000207_en.pdf.

- Keep international supply chains open, in particular those for medicine and medical equipment, food and energy
- Bolster mechanisms to guarantee companies' liquidity, payment chains and the stability of the financial system
- Defer external debt servicing for highly indebted countries to increase their fiscal space
- Develop new financial instruments to directly support countries with little to no fiscal space

10. The COVID-19 pandemic should give way to new forms of globalization and geopolitics. This is an opportunity to recall the benefits of multilateralism and strengthen action to advance towards the new model of sustainable and inclusive development sought through the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda. The fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development should be an opportunity to accelerate the efforts of the region to realize a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, leaving behind the models that weakened the capacity to respond to the current health and humanitarian crisis.

III. Community of practice of the Latin American countries submitting voluntary national reviews to the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2020

11. One of the key components of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development is the opportunity it offers for peer learning and experience-sharing among countries of the region in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

12. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis and following the postponement of the fourth meeting of the Forum, ECLAC organized, in May 2020, two virtual ad hoc meetings of the community of practice of the Latin American and Caribbean countries submitting voluntary national reviews to the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2020,⁵ in order to ensure that the discussion among the countries could still take place despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic.

13. The first meeting, held on 11 May 2020, was attended by some 120 representatives, including from the national authorities responsible for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Argentina, Costa Rica, Honduras, Ecuador, Peru and Panama, ECLAC authorities, the resident coordinators for Costa Rica, Honduras, Peru and Panama and representatives of the United Nations system in the region. At the second meeting, for the Caribbean subregion, held on 12 May, 50 representatives took part in the discussions, including from the authorities in Barbados, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago, ECLAC authorities, the resident coordinators based in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago and representatives of the United Nations system in the region.

14. At these meetings, the country representatives reported on the progress made in the preparation of national voluntary reviews, as well as the obstacles encountered in the current challenging context. They reaffirmed their countries' commitment to the

⁵ The community of practice holds virtual technical meetings on a monthly basis to promote dialogue among countries of the region submitting voluntary national reviews. The meetings held in May were described as "ad hoc" because national authorities were invited to take part alongside their technical teams.

2030 Agenda at the beginning of the decade of action and referred to the difficulty of implementing it given the urgent demand for human and financial resources for the pandemic response and the reduction of the fiscal space to meet those demands in the short term, without putting aside medium- and long-term plans. The small island developing States of the Caribbean appealed for consideration of their vulnerability to economic and climate shocks and their limited capacity to respond to the pandemic with their already limited resources. They requested innovative mechanisms of financing and support to alleviate or postpone debt servicing, in order to address the current challenges and rebuild their economies in the post-COVID period.

IV. Virtual briefing of Latin American and Caribbean countries in preparation for the operational activities for development segment of the Economic and Social Council

15. The meeting was held on 15 May 2020 and attended by the permanent representatives to the United Nations in New York of the 33 Latin American and Caribbean member countries of ECLAC. The meeting was chaired by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Cuba, as Chair of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development. At the meeting, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Mexico, in his capacity as Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council, reported on the operational activities for development segment of the Council (19–22 May 2020) and preparations for the high-level political forum (6–17 July 2020).

16. The Executive Secretary of ECLAC presented the regional portal on the Sustainable Development Goals (Sustainable Development Goal Gateway), developed by ECLAC with the support of the United Nations system in the region as a contribution to the countries in their efforts to follow up on the 2030 Agenda. At the meeting, participants emphasized that cooperation and multilateralism must prevail and that more and better action was needed to focus on rebuilding post-crisis. ECLAC also presented its measures and proposals, such as virtual meetings of its subsidiary bodies and analysis documents, as well as the content of the COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean, launched by ECLAC to support countries during the pandemic.

V. Subsidiary bodies of ECLAC and regional dialogue platforms

17. In order to advance the 2030 Agenda in the region amid the COVID-19 pandemic, all the multilateral dialogue platforms of ECLAC must continue to work in support of countries, leaving no one behind. Accordingly, the subsidiary bodies of ECLAC have been holding virtual meetings with government representatives at the highest level on matters relating to the workplan, the work of the subsidiary bodies and the COVID-19 crisis. These meetings have been attended by representatives of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, as well as resident coordinators, as key actors in the implementation of measures on the ground.

18. **24 March–15 April. Meeting of authorities of national statistical agencies.** Through the Knowledge Transfer Network of the Statistical Conference of the Americas (Conectados RTC), six virtual meetings of national statistical offices and institutes were organized by ECLAC, jointly with the International Labour Organization, to assist the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean in evaluating the impact of the pandemic on statistical operations. ECLAC reported on the results of a questionnaire sent to national statistical offices and central banks to ascertain the effects of the health emergency on the functioning of statistical institutions. Twenty

countries responded, and all reported that they were in a health emergency of some kind. The commitment of the national statistical offices and the standing of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC facilitated this remote work.

19. **2 and 21 April.** A virtual meeting on the role of ministries of social development in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic was held as part of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the participation of ministers and secretaries of social development. The meeting comprised two sessions: the representatives of the Latin American countries met on 2 April and those of the Caribbean countries on 21 April. Between them, the two meetings brought together 29 representatives of member States and 10 representatives of associate members.

20. The participants analysed the main socioeconomic problems and priorities in social protection, the difficulties and challenges of the crisis and lessons learned, and cooperation needs. All countries are taking measures to mitigate the impact of the crisis, principally by attempting to reduce the loss of human life, prevent the worsening of poverty and extreme poverty, and avert setbacks in the protection of rights. They are trying to sustain family incomes by means of resources in cash or in kind, such as food assistance. All emphasized the impact of the crisis on the poor and the use of special conditional transfers to alleviate the lack of autonomous income amid the paralysis of economic activity, which has affected the self-employed in particular.

21. **8 April. Technical meeting on the challenges and needs of ministries of social development in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.** The purpose of the meeting was to share lessons learned, exchange experiences and identify areas of mutual technical assistance and international cooperation on urgent issues and matters identified by governments regarding assistance for the population during the pandemic. The difficulties and challenges highlighted related to the management and quality of data sources, in particular for selecting and reaching the target population. Participants emphasized the usefulness of measures based on digital technologies and innovative management models, as well as the importance of maintaining a medium- and long-term view while responding to the emergency. Participants also commended the inter-agency work and the work carried out with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes.

22. **8 April. Briefing of ministers and high-level authorities of mechanisms for the advancement of women in Latin America and the Caribbean on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis from a gender perspective.** The briefing was organized by ECLAC and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and attended by representatives of 29 countries in the region. ECLAC presented the document “The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating the care crisis in Latin America and the Caribbean”⁶ and a mapping of initiatives by Latin American and Caribbean Governments to address the gender dimensions of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

23. The central themes of the meeting were the increasingly unequal distribution of care work in the context of social isolation and the increase in physical, psychological and economic violence against women in connection with staying at home. Emphasis was placed on the importance of the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030 and the Santiago Commitment as regional instruments for a comprehensive approach to pandemic responses. Information was shared on the main initiatives in areas such as the prevention of violence against women, the promotion of shared responsibility for care and the protection of women’s jobs and income. As a result, ECLAC is

⁶ https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45352/4/S2000260_en.pdf.

including government initiatives on gender equality in the COVID-19 Observatory and will continue to promote opportunities for discussion and regional cooperation to foster a gender-sensitive, coordinated response to the crisis.

24. **13 April. Virtual meeting of ministers of finance of Latin America and the Caribbean to share experiences regarding fiscal responses to the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.** The presentations referred to common objectives in strategies to control the pandemic and mitigate its social and economic effects. Among the measures implemented are: increases in the budgets of public health systems to expand their capacity to provide care; the strengthening of social protection networks with transfers to compensate for the income losses of formal and informal workers; credit lines to provide liquidity to businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, to protect the economy's productive capacity; and tax relief measures to provide short-term liquidity to taxpayers. The participants agreed on the importance of holding additional virtual meetings to continue to share information and foster regional discussion on initiatives to address shared fiscal issues.

25. **28 April.** A meeting with prime ministers, Heads of State, ministers of finance and secretaries of finance, as well as other high-level government representatives from 15 countries and territories of the Caribbean, heads of Caribbean regional organizations and representatives of other agencies of the United Nations system, and resident coordinators in the subregion, was held to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their economies, which had already been affected by both climate and economic shocks, including high levels of indebtedness and high exposure to natural disasters. Participants emphasized that the countries of the Caribbean must expand their fiscal space and that they need more favourable financial conditions, despite their levels of per capita income, to address the effects of the pandemic. As they are considered middle- or high-income countries, the Caribbean countries lack access to liquidity on favourable terms. Policy proposals are therefore urgently needed to support the economic recovery with a people-centred approach.

26. **7 May.** The briefing of the member countries of the Conference on Science, Innovation and Information and Communications Technologies, a subsidiary body of ECLAC, was attended by representatives of authorities from 15 countries of the region, as well as the Assistant Director General for Natural Sciences of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. An overview of the current science and technology system in Latin America and the Caribbean and its main challenges was presented. Participants noted the need to strengthen regional integration, capacities in the health industry and the digital economy. The pandemic has laid bare the need for an approach that transcends national boundaries to strengthen regional integration on the basis of science and technology systems linked across countries and their production systems. The pandemic has forced the adoption of new ways of working, learning and interacting with one another. The discussions also touched on the technological and social challenges involved in offering the option of teleworking to more people and the option of telelearning to allow children and adolescents to continue their studies.

VI. Other instruments and measures to support the countries of the region in the context of COVID-19

27. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the post-COVID-19 world will require more regional cooperation. Accordingly, ECLAC has made tools and documents available to facilitate tracking of the public policies adopted in the 33 countries of the region and to offer economic and social analyses to assist the countries in leaving no one behind.

COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean: economic and social impact⁷

28. On 3 April 2020, ECLAC launched the COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean to serve as a source of information on and analysis of the economic and social impacts of the pandemic and to monitor the evolution of the crisis and the short-, medium- and long-term measures taken by the Governments of the 33 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. It is a regional communication platform for disseminating analyses of the economic and social effects at the national and regional levels on health systems, the structure of the labour market, employment, education, industry, trade and macroeconomic policy.

COVID-19 geoportal: disseminating and monitoring measures to address the pandemic

29. As part of the COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC has launched a geoportal that provides access to information on the measures taken by the countries of the region to address the pandemic. The information is disaggregated by type of measure: movement restrictions, health, the economy, work, social protection and education; gender-related measures will be included soon. This tool facilitates the dissemination and exchange of experiences within the region to enable countries to strengthen their management of the pandemic.

Knowledge Transfer Network of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC⁸

30. The Knowledge Transfer Network is a forum for strengthening knowledge and cooperation in the field of statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean. It enables the sharing of ideas and recommendations among national statistical offices and other actors in national statistical systems, in particular on the continuity of key statistical operations during the pandemic. The Network has a web page through which it disseminates the publications and announcements of international organizations and national statistical offices concerning recommendations and contingency plans.

COVID-19 special reports

31. These reports contain information and analysis for policymakers and the general public on the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic and support evidence-based policymaking in response to the crisis. The special reports are published periodically and address the impact of the pandemic on specific areas. As at 20 May 2020, three special reports had been published, and they are available through the COVID-19 Observatory:

- (a) Special report No. 1: “Latin America and the Caribbean and the COVID-19 pandemic: economic and social effects”;
- (b) Special report No. 2: “Measuring the impact of COVID-19 with a view to reactivation”;
- (c) Special report No. 3: “The social challenge in times of COVID-19”.

⁷ www.cepal.org/en/topics/covid-19.

⁸ <https://rtc-cea.cepal.org/en>.