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## High-level political forum on sustainable development

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

## **Synthesis of voluntary submissions by functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies and forums**

### **Note by the Secretariat**

The present document provides a synthesis of the voluntary submissions prepared by functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies and forums. Contributions were provided in response to the invitation of the President of the Council contained in her letter dated 14 January 2020<sup>1</sup> addressed to the Chairs of those bodies, in which she requested that they offer substantive input to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, highlighting their contributions towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for

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\* E/HLPF/2020/1.

<sup>1</sup> [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25650Draft\\_letter\\_for\\_inputs\\_by\\_ECOSOC\\_functional\\_commissions\\_and\\_other\\_intergovt\\_bodies.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25650Draft_letter_for_inputs_by_ECOSOC_functional_commissions_and_other_intergovt_bodies.pdf).



Sustainable Development.<sup>2</sup> The integral texts of the submissions received for the present synthesis report are available on the forum's website.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The present document has benefited from contributions received from: (a) functional commissions and expert bodies of the Economic and Social Council: Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Commission on Science and Technology for Development, Commission on the Status of Women, Committee for Development Policy, Committee of Experts on Public Administration, United Nations Forum on Forests, United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and Statistical Commission; (b) regional commissions: Economic Commission for Europe, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; (c) United Nations intergovernmental and related bodies: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Committee on Migrant Workers, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Committee on the Rights of the Child, Committee on World Food Security, Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna, Human Rights Council, Inter-American Development Bank, International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, International Renewable Energy Agency, International Standards of Accounting and Reporting, International Telecommunication Union Administrative Council, International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Capital Development Fund, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), UNESCO Sustainable Development Goal-Education 2030 Steering Committee, UNESCO World Heritage Centre, United Nations Environment Assembly, Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations and its technical and intergovernmental bodies, United Nations Group on the Information Society, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations System Staff College, United Nations University, United Nations Volunteers, Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, World Intellectual Property Organization, World Meteorological Organization, World Summit on the Information Society Forum and World Tourism Organization; and (d) other intergovernmental bodies: 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Pattern, Global Forum on Migration and Development, Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and Steering Committee of the Partnership on Measuring Information and Communication Technology for Development.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/inputs/>.

## I. Introduction

1. The high-level political forum on sustainable development provides a central platform for follow-up and review at the global level of progress towards the implementation of General Assembly resolution 70/1, entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. In line with paragraph 82 of the resolution, the forum facilitates the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned. It also provides political leadership, guidance and recommendations for follow-up and promotes the system-wide coherence and coordination of sustainable development policies.

2. In paragraph 85 of the same resolution, the General Assembly called for thematic reviews of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, including with regard to cross-cutting issues, to take place at the high-level political forum. In accordance with existing mandates, the forum’s review of progress, global achievements and challenges is supported by the reviews of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies and forums, which should reflect the integrated nature of the Goals and the interlinkages between them.

3. The President of the Council therefore invited the functional commissions and expert bodies of the Council and other intergovernmental bodies and forums, including global platforms and intergovernmental organization-driven mechanisms that contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, to share relevant input and deliberations as to how they address the goals and targets from the perspective of the theme of the 2020 high-level political forum, “Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”.

4. The present document is based on a synthesis of the voluntary submissions received as at 23 April 2020<sup>4</sup> and does not suggest a formal reporting link to the forum or modify any entity’s mandate or governance. It provides information on how the intergovernmental bodies are responding to the theme of the 2020 high-level political forum, including an assessment, based on their work, of critical gaps in implementation, highlights key policies and measures to ensure accelerated action and transformative pathways for realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, and includes specific actions recommended by the contributing entities. Some entries have also addressed action taken since the onset of the current global crisis surrounding the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and these are reflected in the document.

## II. Key policies and measures to ensure accelerated action and transformative pathways for realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

5. The multilateral system is under threat at a time when it urgently needs reform and reinvigoration to promote the 2030 Agenda. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic that had assailed communities around the world and driven the global economy into a downturn, whose long-term effects cannot yet be fully assessed, the collective effort to implement the 2030 Agenda and the Goals had reached a crossroads. The high-level political forum completed its first four-year cycle, which culminated in the Sustainable Development Goals Summit that was held under the auspices of the General Assembly in September 2019. In assessing the progress

<sup>4</sup> Contributions received after 23 April and all other submissions are available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/inputs/>.

achieved five years after the historic adoption of the Agenda by Heads of State and Government, it is clear that much work has been done to align frameworks and policies at the international and national levels to achieve the Goals, foster collaboration to gather data, forge partnerships and nurture the transformative vision of sustainable development across sectors and among populations. Yet much more effort is needed – especially now – to ensure a successful decade of action and delivery for sustainable development. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic requires a rethinking of immediate policy responses.

6. The inputs of United Nations system entities that are synthesized in the present report for the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development demonstrate progress but also setbacks in various areas of the 2030 Agenda, identify transformative pathways and groups at risk of being left behind and point the way forward for Member States, stakeholders and all who are interested in making the decade of action for sustainable development a success. In contributing to a road map for the next 10 years, the inputs begin by identifying where progress is lagging and attention is most needed.

7. The COVID-19 pandemic may set back the attainment of the Goals. It could also determine the ability of Governments to take extraordinary steps to attain the Goals.

## **A. Critical gaps in implementing the 2030 Agenda**

### **Many are being left behind**

8. The devastating impact and rapid spread of COVID-19 has made public-health responses the absolute priority of Governments around the world. Countries are struggling to tackle the health risks while mitigating the socioeconomic repercussions of confinement, production slowdown and job losses. COVID-19 has affected everyone regardless of gender, geography, ethnicity, religion, wealth or other status.

9. Where existing levels of inequality are high, the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis are having an impact on the most vulnerable populations in a disproportionate and more severe manner. Women in particular have experienced multiple and compounded forms of discrimination while on the front lines of responses, at home, as part of the health workforce and in various sectors of production.

10. Uneven governance arrangements reveal other disconnects, including between national and subnational levels, in how the Goals are being embraced and prioritized. Many countries still lack adequate social protection measures for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, including indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, women and children. The capacity of the public sector to deal with crises is also uneven, and the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed stark discrepancies in terms of unequal health-care systems, varying capacities to rally different arms and institutions, and efforts to implement virtual learning and educational support while addressing digital divides.

11. Many government institutions are not able to implement the Goals at the desired scale and speed because of a general undervaluing of the public sector in economic theories of the past decades, which has resulted in smaller but less effective public administration and a disregard for the public value that it may create. The silo mentality continues to hamper the holistic implementation of the Goals and hinder action to ensure that no one is left behind. Stronger political commitment is needed to connect the political and administrative silos within international policy action, development aid and peacebuilding, as well as to reinforce existing multilateral and regional political and economic mechanisms.

12. The constantly shifting nature of population distribution across demographics such as age, race, ethnicity, income and education levels makes it more difficult to

track and measure the socioeconomic positions of countries and groups. International migration, together with migration policymaking, has become one of the most debated and crucial areas of public administration in almost every country. Migration directly affects both State welfare and individual well-being. The shifting dynamics of jobs and their geographical location and the mass migration of workers to urban areas highlight problems such as overcrowding and social and economic inequalities.

### **Persistent poverty and inequality undermine progress**

13. Inequalities continue to widen at local, national and global levels. Disparities across factors such as income, social class, geographic location, urban-rural divides, access to education, health care and basic necessities are pervasive and determine progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

14. The current global economic recession is precipitating a rise in poverty, wider global economic inequality and an inequitable distribution of development gains within and among countries. While we continue to use ever-increasing amounts of natural resources to support our economic activity, the efficiency with which resources are used remains unchanged. Therefore we have not yet seen a decoupling of economic growth from environmental degradation. In addition, the use of natural resources and the related benefits and environmental impacts are unevenly distributed across countries and regions. Perpetuating current modes of production and consumption, and the current levels of inequality associated with them, is untenable.

15. Least developed countries continue to experience low levels of per capita income, domestic savings and investments, and have small tax bases. They remain heavily dependent on external finance, including official development assistance, foreign direct investment, remittances and external loans. However, these resources are not sufficient to meet the needs of this vulnerable group of countries and, as a result, development progress has been uneven.

16. Lack of structural transformation and diversification of economies to build sustained inclusive economic growth has also slowed progress in least developed countries. Investment in developing productive capacities, especially at the local level beyond the capital cities – including in entrepreneurship, climate resilient infrastructure, energy, agriculture, science and technology and digitalization – is insufficient to support attempts at transformation. Least developed countries continue to face challenges in mobilizing commercial and other capital for investments that can drive their economic transformation.

### **Human rights and justice are threatened in times of crisis**

17. Sustainable development depends on systemic, comprehensive and integrated investment in populations to ensure that they can achieve their capabilities and contribute fully to development. These include, fulfilment of dignity, equality and human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights; universal access to good-quality education, decent work and lifelong good health; security of place; accountable systems of governance based on transparent national data; and resilience in the face of environmental and other humanitarian threats.

18. Despite the appeal of the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire amid the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflicts and group-targeted violence associated with them, and violations of basic human rights continue to present significant challenges to peaceful progress. Women worldwide are among the first victims of crises, conflicts and rights violations. There are setbacks in the achievement of progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Many women and girls experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, vulnerability,

marginalization and violence throughout their lifetimes. These forms of discrimination are now on the rise amid a climate of global uncertainty.

19. In the context of crime prevention and criminal justice, the principle of leaving no one behind translates into addressing the nexus between social vulnerability and crime. Patterns of social vulnerability are defined by gender, age and income in relation to certain types of crimes and offences.

20. While advances in information and communications technologies have provided significant economic and social advantages to countries, communities and children, thereby fuelling economic development and encouraging interconnectedness through the sharing of ideas and experiences, such advances have also wrought an unprecedented explosion of cybercrime. Opportunities for human trafficking and the production and distribution of material that violates the integrity and rights of women and children, irrespective of their physical location or nationality, is an emerging threat. The complex nature of crimes committed in the borderless realm of cyberspace is also compounded by the increasing involvement of organized crime groups.

21. Furthermore, corruption and lack of access to independent and efficient judicial systems have a major negative impact on economic growth, as justice is essential for the rule of law to prevail. Corruption not only undermines democratic institutions, but also slows economic development and contributes to governmental instability.

### **Hunger and malnutrition are on the rise**

22. The absolute number of people in the world affected by undernourishment or chronic food deprivation is estimated to have increased for the fourth consecutive year to over 820 million in 2019. The World Food Programme announced this week that the COVID-19 pandemic could push another 130 million people into acute hunger. Hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition disproportionately affect the poor, in particular the extreme poor, who are largely concentrated in rural areas and depend on agriculture for a living.

23. Small-scale food producers, family farmers and indigenous peoples – particularly women and youth – remain vulnerable, and the current measures and policy decisions are not robust enough to unlock their potential to be critical agents of change.

24. The impact of economic slowdowns and downturns on food security and nutrition cannot be separated from the root causes of hunger and malnutrition, namely poverty, inequality and marginalization; and national efforts are insufficiently coordinated. Lack of knowledge and capacity to enforce food safety standards emerge as a critical gap, particularly in developing countries.

25. In addition to the persistence of hunger and malnutrition in many areas, overweight and obesity rates are rising in every region of the world, with undernutrition, overweight and obesity often coexisting in the same household. Results of the first analysis of country-level indicators show that obesity rates are higher in countries where moderate food insecurity is high.

### **Unsustainable management of natural resources threaten biodiversity**

26. Not all countries and stakeholders fully recognize that poverty and hunger are closely interlinked with sustainable food systems, forests, oceans, freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity. Lack of progress in the sustainable management of the natural resource base presents a serious challenge to the achievement of the Goals. Changes in land and water use and management, pollution, overuse of external inputs, overexploitation and overharvesting, and the proliferation of invasive alien species all negatively impact biodiversity for food and agriculture. Loss and degradation of ecosystems and transitions to more intensive production that relies on a limited range

of species, varieties and breeds remain major drivers of biodiversity loss for food and agriculture and ecosystem services.

27. Despite the crucial contribution of forests and sustainable forest management to sustainable development, deforestation and forest degradation continue in many regions, often in response to the demand for wood, food, fuel and fibre. Global demand for and consumption of forest products and services is projected to accelerate and put further pressure on forests. Currently, over seven million hectares of natural forests are converted annually to other land uses, owing chiefly to large-scale commercial agriculture and other economic activities. While the rate of deforestation has slowed in many regions over the past decade, estimates indicate that tree cover loss has been steadily rising in the tropics since 2000 owing to human and natural causes, including fires and storms. That has posed significant challenges that require urgent cross-sectoral action at all levels to sustainably manage forests, including through conservation, restoration and expansion. There is particular urgency to take decisive action to halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally.

28. The management of genetic resources used in aquaculture has major implications for food security and nutrition, as aquaculture production now surpasses capture fisheries. The expansion of protected areas for marine biodiversity and the existence of policies and treaties that encourage responsible use of ocean resources are still insufficient to combat the adverse effects of overfishing, increasing ocean acidification due to climate change, and worsening coastal eutrophication. As billions of people depend on the ocean for their livelihood and food source, given the transboundary nature of oceans, increased efforts and interventions at all levels are needed to conserve and sustainably use ocean resources.

### **Climate crisis continues**

29. Many developing countries, especially least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, are extremely vulnerable to climate change, owing to their structural characteristics and the fact that their economic growth is dependent on climate-sensitive sectors, as well as their lack of resilient infrastructure. As climate change accelerates, there is growing recognition that local governments must play a key role in adaptation and building resilience; but progress is insufficient to reduce greenhouse gas emissions below the targets set out in the Paris Agreement. Access to climate finance to fund infrastructure for climate resilience and adaptation, and to strengthen the capacities of Governments, in general, and subnational governments, in particular, must be scaled up significantly and at a faster rate.

30. Given the strong synergies between the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, it is noteworthy that countries have been requested to progressively increase the ambitions of their nationally determined contributions, to be communicated every five years, with the next communication due in 2020. This is one of the “ratchet” mechanisms of the Paris Agreement, in addition to expanding ambitions on renewable energy deployment. Current electricity targets of nationally determined contributions overlook an estimated 59 per cent of the potential for renewable electricity deployment in line with the Paris Agreement, and do not reflect the actual growth of renewable power.

31. With 840 million people still living without access to electricity, and 2.9 billion people lacking access to clean cooking, a “business-as-usual” pathway will not meet the goal of universal access by 2030. Despite remarkable progress over the past decade, renewables still face persistent financial, regulatory and sometimes technological barriers. Policies have focused on renewable electricity so far, and few countries have implemented policies on the use of renewable energy for heating and transport.

**Digital divides disrupt education**

32. Information and communications technologies are rapidly transforming societies and economies and have the potential to address complex and interconnected development challenges. However, that potential must be strategically leveraged to help achieve the Goals by 2030. The rapid advancement of technology tends to benefit those with the resources to access, implement and take on board innovations, but further widens the gap for those with less access.

33. Access to information and communications technologies has continued to grow, with mobile cellular signals now reaching more than 95 per cent of the global population, and more than 50 per cent have access to the Internet. However, large discrepancies remain between regions and countries. The proportion of people using the Internet in developed countries is more than four times that in least developed countries. Affordability is a barrier to access for many people, which reduces opportunities to take advantage of new technology and potentially exacerbates other inequalities. In addition, lack of relevant technical and navigational skills continues to be an impediment for the deployment and use of information and communications technologies, as does the lack of “soft” skills. Data suggest that developing countries are particularly disadvantaged when it comes to digital skills.

34. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the education of millions of youth and raises the immediate challenge of ensuring continuity and equity of education through alternative means. Even when temporary, school closures carry high social and economic costs. This situation puts immense pressure on Governments to provide open, distance and online learning responses that are unevenly developed within and across countries, and which tend to put vulnerable and marginalized children and youth at a disadvantage. The context calls for resolute international cooperation to share tools and experiences, build capacity to respond to crises and prevent further widening of education gaps.

35. More and better data on how information and communications technologies can accelerate progress towards achieving the Goals, including by facilitating the implementation and delivery of measures in all domains, is needed. Countries should step up the production of national data on access and use of information and communications technologies and their enabling environment that are relevant to their policies, goals and targets, but that are also internationally comparable.

**Gaps persist in research and development**

36. There is a wide gap in technological capabilities between developed and developing countries. Research and development expenditures in most developing countries are much smaller – both in absolute terms and in relation to gross domestic product – than the world average. This reflects low business research and development expenditures (32 to 38 per cent) in developing countries, equivalent to almost half the world average of 68 per cent. In 2014, there were 1,098 researchers per 1 million people globally, but only 87.9 per 1 million in sub-Saharan Africa, and 63.4 per 1 million in least developed countries. The proportion of women researchers in engineering and technology in most developing countries is 10 to 40 per cent. Women are also a minority among computer science graduates and are underrepresented among decision-makers in many sectors of science, technology and innovation.

**Data gaps prevent accurate assessment of progress**

37. Insufficient statistical capacity for monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is a gap that must be urgently filled if progress is to be measured effectively.

Efforts to address data gaps by supporting the development of statistical standards and methodologies is ongoing, but must be widely supported.

38. Gaps in data, information and analysis to support informed and evidence-based decision-making reveal the need for better sectoral data and analysis of critical interlinkages – in terms of both synergies and trade-offs – between forests, fishery, aquaculture, oceans management, food security and nutrition, biodiversity, the water cycle, soil conservation, carbon sequestration, habitat protection, poverty and livelihoods, and of the interrelation between sustainable management and use of resources and economic growth, trade and market-related data. Data, evidence and policy analysis on pathways to address sustainability-related issues and trade-offs remain scattered and are often not available when and where needed.

39. In developing countries and countries with transitional economies, elements that have an impact on the corporate reporting environment include weaknesses in legal and regulatory frameworks, lack of human capacity and relevant supporting institutions, as well as obstacles to adequate monitoring and enforcement of international standards and codes. In particular, developing countries require tools that would enable identification of gaps through international benchmarking, elaboration of action plans for accounting reforms and measurement of progress in priority areas.

40. In addition, a number of Sustainable Development Goal targets are tied to indicators that are still classified as tier III, meaning that either the indicators are still under methodological development or that they are not yet being consistently tracked by countries. This highlights a clear information gap in assessing the challenges, measuring the progress and identifying the most appropriate solutions for achieving the Goals.

## **B. Priority measures to accelerate action and ensure transformative pathways**

41. Increasingly frequent and intense natural disasters are jeopardizing the overall achievement of the 2030 Agenda. While the economic, social and environmental effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are just beginning to unfold, it is evident that it will require a long-term global effort towards joint action to prevent further catastrophic consequences. Disaster risks often converge with critical socioeconomic vulnerabilities, which contribute to perpetuating intergenerational poverty and marginalization. A unified, global health and infectious disease response framework is needed to help prepare for future health-related disasters.

42. The current world health crisis is also a test for governance, leadership and democratic institutions, national and international commitments, and adherence to the principles of gender equality, non-discrimination and solidarity, both nationally and internationally. No country and no leader can do it alone. The current situation calls for the conceptualization of support models for stimulating local action from the bottom up, based on the strategic premise that, in such a global crisis, every local group and individual action counts.

43. Accelerated action to achieve the Goals requires guidance in policy and governance innovation, including fast-track reform initiatives based on innovative breakthroughs and incremental reforms that target long-term, cumulative results. These all come with embedded and corollary risks, and may produce both success and failure. Accepting the need to innovate means willingness to take risks. It should be noted that governance failures are not contingent upon unpredictable events alone; they often result from a mismatch between the design of a governance mechanism, the problem it is intended to address and the underlying social and political context. Other forms of

governance failure emerge because of lack of governance capacity (e.g., competences, skills and capabilities) or ineffective management of governance frameworks.

44. In general, innovation can be achieved through mechanisms such as legislative reform and collaborative models of governance; access to quality public services with focus on education; promotion of transparency and accountability; balancing of long-term needs with short-term urgencies; resource mobilization for the achievement of strategic, institutional and policy goals; and collaboration between national, subnational, local and community levels to address issues and take action in real time.

45. Whole-of-government approaches require reform of existing perceptions and approaches to achieving the Goals as individual and separate policy silos. More coordination, better cooperation and increased capacity-building are required in the planning and decision-making processes of Governments, agencies and intergovernmental bodies. Collaboration to establish effective mechanisms for vertical and horizontal integration and to facilitate dialogue between national and local governments can strengthen governance across the board to support progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda.

46. Priority measures and specific areas in which progress can be transformative are set out in paragraphs 47 to 86 below.

### **Include everyone**

47. A coherent whole-of-Government approach and collaborative engagement on the part of all relevant institutions and stakeholders throughout the policy cycle are crucial for achieving the 2030 Agenda. Aligning policies in a coherent way calls for the availability of auditable data on outcomes – for statistical offices, audit offices and civil society organizations, among others – and access to technology platforms and knowledge hubs that can promote sharing, mutual learning and local ownership. Widespread communication, in particular with youth, is important to build awareness and support action.

48. Leaving no one behind will often require avoiding top-down approaches to local development. The establishment of focal points within communities to assess the extent of possible decentralization and to value the impact of national-local transfers can be important. Empowering and supporting cities, local authorities and communities is also vital for effective crime prevention and criminal justice policy responses.

49. Inclusion of subnational actors in voluntary national review processes should be encouraged to strengthen local ownership of the Goals, along with the development of local strategies by large cities or by groups of smaller cities. Children and youth can be empowered as active agents of change.

50. Acceleration of the implementation of the Goals will benefit from a balance of public strategy such as planning and design and hands-on learning through experience. At the same time, a significant portion of basic government action is about stability and reliability to ensure the delivery of protection and services to citizens.

51. The facilitation of greater coordination, negotiation and more meaningful multi-stakeholder engagement is more important than ever, in the light of the current global health and economic crisis, to ensure progress through multilateral, coordinated and evidence-based policy responses.

52. Investing in small but transformational infrastructure projects at the local level – such as feeder roads, bridges, microhydro systems and climate adaptation – will be key to achieving the Goals. Such projects create substantial development dividends for food security, women's economic empowerment, clean energy access, climate resilience, local economic development and domestic resource mobilization.

53. Blended finance can be made to work better for small and medium-sized enterprises in least developed countries. Scalable blended-finance approaches that address currency exchange risk, ticket size and risk tolerance, among others, will be critical. These solutions are possible within the existing development finance architecture, but require innovations to increase ticket size and diversify risk, amplification of technical assistance facilities to identify and support pipeline and credit-scoring processes on the ground, and the creation of integrated guarantee facilities in domestic finance institutions to help drive more domestic capital into local development. That could also include greater use of grants and concessional capital for small and medium-sized enterprises in the early stage of growth (the “missing middle”) in least developed countries to enable them to demonstrate credit worthiness, which will allow for greater access to blended finance and commercial capital.

54. Wider adoption of financial technology solutions will help to further deepen financial inclusion and build broader, inclusive digital markets and economies, including in areas such as clean energy access, agriculture productivity and transport.

55. A whole-of-Government framework is also the most likely to succeed in achieving both migration and development objectives. Different government departments can avoid working at cross purposes and instead reinforce each other’s efforts by, for example, implementing migration policies that support – or at least do not undermine – development fundamentals, or by pursuing trade agreements that also facilitate labour mobility.

56. National Governments make the laws and regulations that govern migration, but they do not control the driving forces – both positive and negative – behind migration, such as demographic trends, the impacts of climate change and the powerful drive that families have for reunification. Effective policies and programmes are much more likely to emerge from whole-of-society processes that involve other elements of society not only in consultations, but also in active partnership.

57. Countering harmful and inaccurate portrayals of how migrants and migration affect host and home communities requires sustained efforts by Governments at all levels, in partnership with other key actors, including the private sector, migrant organizations and civil society institutions.

58. Mainstreaming migration into policy planning should be a cross-sectoral effort involving health, education, employment, justice, urban planning and national security, as well as development planning. Remittances may be the most visible contribution that migrants make to their countries of origin – and it is vital that the stubbornly high costs of remittances be reduced – but their non-monetary contributions may be equally or even more important in opening transformative pathways to development.

### **Combat corruption**

59. The rule of law and development are strongly interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Advancement of the rule of law at the national and international levels, including through crime prevention and criminal justice mechanisms, is essential for sustained and inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. Where to focus the development of capacity for change depends on the existing quality and performance of public administration and governance in a given institutional setting.

60. Every administration must be vigilant with regard to the risk and reality of corruption and conflicts of interest in public life, both of which have corrosive effects on public trust in governance and detrimental economic impacts. Corruption raises costs, distorts decisions, misallocates resources and discourages enterprise and investment through its unpredictability. In addition, it is linked to overspending, fiscal

deficit, undercollection of taxes, underabsorption of funds, gender inequality and discrimination against minorities and other vulnerable groups in relation to access to positions of power and the brain drain from the economy.

61. However, combatting corruption should not lead to rigid administration in which innovation and risk-taking are no longer possible. Accountability with flexibility within an innovative and learning public service is essential. Responses from public services must be swift when necessary and take into account changing circumstances, while ensuring that adequate checks and balances are in place.

### **Empower women**

62. Countries should regularly assess and monitor the gendered consequences and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, collect and analyse data, and plan to sustain and further promote gender equality in the period following the health crisis. This requires a fit-for-purpose national apparatus and robust gender infrastructure. National machineries for the advancement of women, related gender equality mechanisms and national human rights institutions are often fragile, underskilled, underfunded, lacking appropriate architecture, authority or regulatory powers for effective oversight, surveillance or impact monitoring. They are further hampered in their mandates during crises. Countries have to engage and sustain these mechanisms and further develop them during and after the COVID-19 crisis. They should not undermine, side-line or reduce financial resources for gender equality, but rather they should use the opportunity to overhaul their operations, and plan and effect further investments in this area. These steps will be essential for ensuring women's leadership and integral participation in decision-making in the period of "convalescence" of societies.

63. Support to civil society actors should be increased in order for them to reach all segments of the population and address all aspects of the daily lives of women and girls to ensure they receive adequate support. Women worldwide are among the first victims of crises, conflicts and rights violations; at the same time, they are the leading forces of sustainable development and transformative change.

64. Economic recovery strategies should focus on gender equality as a driving force of sustainable development. Women's engagement in the political and public sphere and economic responsibilities in all areas, including climate change and digital fields, must be considered as a top priority in recovery strategies, with the ultimate aim of building a development model that is more respectful of people and their fundamental rights. Governments are called upon to grasp this moment in human history as an opportunity to adopt transformative strategies that are centred on women's empowerment and leadership.

65. Progress in this area demands the elimination of discriminatory laws and social norms, structural barriers and gender stereotypes, and the promotion of social norms and practices that empower all women and girls. Action must be taken to strengthen the effectiveness and accountability of institutions at all levels to promote gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, as well as ensure equal access to justice and public services.

### **Integrate and link nexus issues**

66. Accelerating progress during the decade of action requires ensuring that policies build on the synergies among the Goals. National governments can do more to ensure policy coherence across ministries and integrate strategies that deal with forests, agriculture, food, land use and rural and national development, while promoting sustainable consumption and production, in close partnership with the private sector, industries and civil society, among other stakeholders. A shift to addressing sustainable production and consumption in national economic plans, financial policy

instruments and national budgets – rather than in environment portfolios – is crucial. It would enable the integration of natural resources and the full cost of their related impacts and negative externalities in these economic policies and instruments.

67. Food systems must broaden boundaries beyond primary production and include efficiencies along the entire food chain, together with the promotion of sustainable practices and diets. This includes reducing food loss and waste, which will require new technologies in harvesting, transportation and storage, as well as enhanced trade patterns and changes in consumer behaviour.

68. Forests, agriculture, water, energy, tourism and health, among others, are interlinked with each other and with other wide-ranging sectors and issues. Agricultural expansion is often the main driver of deforestation in many regions, while forests are important for food security and nutrition, especially for people living in remote areas. Forests also regulate the provision of water and water-related ecosystem services within a larger climate-forest-water-people system and offer sustainable solutions to address pressures from increasing and changing demands from a growing population and economic development. Approximately 75 per cent of the world's accessible freshwater comes from forested watersheds, hence forest-based solutions offer a great potential for the sustainable management of water resources.

69. Integrated approaches such as forest landscape management and sustainable value chains of forest products can facilitate collaboration across sectors and stakeholders, and enhance human and social capital to realize transformative changes. The effective implementation of such cross-sectoral measures requires innovative, inclusive and collaborative governance systems, science-based decision-making and political leadership. Provisions must also be made to support the livelihoods of vulnerable segments of the population, particularly small-scale producers, family farmers, rural women and youth.

70. Improving integration across sectors can create transformative systemic approaches. From a food and agriculture perspective, sustainable food systems are an ideal approach that allow for institutional and policy integration, while addressing all dimensions of sustainability. An integrated approach to food systems means ensuring poverty and hunger eradication measures, taking into account impacts on climate as well as natural resources, sustainable management and use of biodiversity, while sustaining economies and inclusive growth. Data and analysis for mapping interconnections and trade-offs are also made available for informed policy decisions.

71. Small-scale food producers, including small-scale farmers, artisanal fisherfolk and pastoralists, as well as other key actors across agrifood systems, play a critical role in catalysing rural transformations that ensure sustainable livelihoods and human dignity, particularly in countries where smallholder agriculture is the main provider of food and employment. They should be supported by enabling policies and targeted investments. Evidence shows that higher incomes among smallholders can result in more diversified production and healthy diets, and lead to improved nutrition and health. Moreover, closing the gender gap in agriculture can significantly reduce the number of hungry people in the world. Improved livelihoods of small-scale food producers and rural actors can also generate demand for local agricultural inputs, assets and services, commercial distribution, processing infrastructure and services, and non-food consumable goods. This demand creates more entrepreneurship opportunities, particularly for large youth populations and, if met, can help to achieve growth and development in areas that were previously left behind.

72. Market transparency and access to market information is crucial for global food security and nutrition, especially when it comes to making informed and evidence-based policy decisions. There is a need to increase efforts to improve the monitoring and assessment of supply, demand, trade, prices of food and agricultural commodities,

and make the information publicly available in a timely manner so as to enhance transparency and promote the coordination of action. Market transparency is key to strengthening a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory, equitable and predictable bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral trading system that is conducive to world food security, improved nutrition and sustainable agricultural development.

73. Agricultural trade can play an important role as an enabler for achieving the Goals, particularly towards ending poverty and hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture. It can also play a role in climate change adaptation and mitigation and potentially contribute to reducing global greenhouse gas emissions. Agricultural trade is crucial for enhancing and facilitating policy dialogue at global, regional and national levels at the juncture of trade and climate change.

### **Scale-up energy access**

74. Renewable energy has become the fastest growing and cheapest energy source in most parts of the world as a result of cost reductions, innovation and enabling frameworks. Renewable energy is now a key solution for addressing climate change and a practical climate action tool for reaching zero net emissions by 2050.

75. Governments can raise the level of ambition to scale-up renewable energy deployment through long-term plans that align climate and energy objectives and strengthened targets for renewables in revised and enhanced nationally determined contributions. Scaling-up decentralized off-grid renewable energy solutions can close the energy access gap by promoting adequate delivery models, catalysing financing through innovative instruments, adopting enabling policies and regulations, building capacity across the value chain and fostering entrepreneurship.

76. Adopting proactive policies and measures to ensure a just transition and maximize the socioeconomic benefits of renewables can also strengthen interlinkages between sustainable energy and other Goals through a more holistic approach to energy policy, and greater collaboration across sectors like employment, health, agriculture and water. Enhancing cooperation at the regional and subregional levels to promote innovation, investment and capacity-building would also contribute to strengthening such interlinkages.

77. Mainstreaming gender in energy sector frameworks at all levels – including policymaking, programme design and project implementation – can harness the opportunities of greater gender equality that come with the transition to a renewables-based energy system.

### **Bridge digital divides**

78. The potential of information and communications technologies and various digital technologies as key enablers of development and as critical components of innovative development solutions has been fully recognized in the 2030 Agenda. More needs to be done to strategically leverage these technologies to accelerate progress on the Goals during the decade of action. Taking into account the importance of relevant content, skills and an enabling environment, information and communications technologies, including broadband Internet, mobile technologies and relevant applications and services, are recognized for their potential to help empower people, enable wider exercise of human rights, including freedom of expression, foster access to information and knowledge, open up employment and decent work opportunities, promote cultural diversity, and expand access to learning, scientific knowledge and basic services.

79. In recent years, there has been a rapid acceleration in the application of digital technology for providing financial and other services in least developed countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, 45 per cent of adults reported having a mobile money account in 2018, the highest rate in any region in the world. These advances have the potential to benefit women, youth, refugees and migrants as well as small and medium-sized enterprises, and show promise for the development of wider inclusive digital economies and financial inclusion. However, least developed countries especially face difficulties in ensuring that the digital infrastructure, regulatory environment and viable business models that can drive financial inclusion and development of digital economies, as well as provide opportunities to increase domestic resource mobilization, are in place.

80. The benefits of information and communications technologies are not automatic; to accelerate progress towards achieving the Goals, more action is required to ensure linkages of digital investments to acceleration priorities and provide greater support to those at risk of lagging behind. Many developing countries, especially the least developed countries, are inadequately prepared to capture the opportunities emerging as a result of digitalization. Moreover, there is a risk that digitalization will widen income inequalities, as productivity gains may accrue mainly to a few already wealthy and skilled enterprises and individuals. The net impact will depend on the level of development and digital readiness of countries and their stakeholders, as well as on the policies adopted and implemented at national, regional and international levels. The speed at which digital economies and societies are unfolding, and the significant gaps that remain between and across countries, underline the urgency of scaling up global support for capacity-building and technical assistance, as well as for digital governance to ensure that the benefits of digital development are evenly shared.

#### **Close data gaps**

81. Priority measures must be taken to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems, especially in least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and other countries in vulnerable situations, to meet the data demands for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for monitoring and reporting on the Goals and targets. More and better financing is crucial to support national statistical systems in meeting these data demands.

#### **Harness innovation**

82. Rapid technological change could be transformative in implementing the 2030 Agenda, and several frontier technologies have already shown great potential to help to achieve the Goals. For example, big data can address critical global issues, create scientific breakthroughs, advance human health and improve decision-making and the effectiveness of development interventions.

83. The Internet of things monitors and manages connected objects and machines and has applications in areas such as health care, agriculture, energy, water quality and management. Artificial intelligence, combined with robotics, could transform production and business, especially in the manufacturing industry. Similarly, three-dimensional printing enables faster and cheaper low-volume production and rapid iterative prototyping of new products. Biotechnology makes possible personalized treatments and genetic modification of plants and animals. Nanotechnology is used in water purification, battery storage, precise management of agrochemicals and delivery of medication. Renewable energy technologies provide electricity to rural areas that are far from grid systems, while drones are used for precision farming and could revolutionize the delivery of supplies and replace humans in dangerous tasks. Small-scale satellites are used in communication networks and fields that require high-resolution imagery such as monitoring land use and urban planning, and will

soon be affordable for developing countries, businesses and universities. Blockchain technology can be used in applications in which ensuring the integrity and traceability of information about transactions is important, such as identity management and land registration.

84. The concept of intellectual property is critical for innovation, as it contributes to setting the incentive structure for innovators to create new technologies and processes that enhance human lives. Innovation is key to the success of the Goals. Only through human ingenuity and innovation will it be possible to develop new solutions to eradicate poverty, boost agricultural productivity, ensure food security and good nutrition, increase access to energy, improve energy efficiency, fight disease, improve the quality of education, protect the environment, accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy, increase productivity and boost business competitiveness.

#### **Ensure equity in education**

85. In a complex and rapidly changing world, education is central to bridging the gaps among all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Education drives both inclusion and empowerment, as well as generates knowledge that can enable people to properly understand and effectively address global challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts of climate change, in an informed, scientific manner.

86. The COVID-19 pandemic is testing national capacities to shift to large-scale distance learning to ensure continuity of schooling. It has revealed gaps in knowledge about available tools, lack of teacher preparation, connectivity issues and disparities in access. Students from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds are most at risk of missing out, notably due to uneven access to information and communications technologies, infrastructures and tools.

87. Given the critical role that teachers play in improving the quality of education and learning outcomes, countries need to invest more in increasing the supply of qualified teachers, by strengthening support for teacher training and professional development, as well as ensuring decent working conditions. Public financing is critical for education, and international financing must prioritize investment in education to ensure predictable, sustainable, efficient and coherent funding sources.

### **III. Selected recommendations for accelerating progress**

88. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of sustainable development and the need for disaster preparedness in the face of unexpected shocks to environmental, economic and social systems. In the decade of action, transformative pathways must be underpinned by policy responses that are sustained, sustainable and equitable.

89. The principle of leaving no one behind is particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order for people the world over to emerge from global crises with increased solidarity, it will be important to adhere to human rights norms and promote inclusive governance, social and economic justice, environmental sustainability and peace. The 2030 Agenda is more relevant than ever today, and can serve to strengthen multilateralism at a time when it is most needed.

90. The actions set out below are recommended by the functional commissions and expert bodies of the Council and other intergovernmental bodies and forums in their contributions. They are considered the most relevant and impactful ways to accelerate progress and forge transformative pathways for realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development:

- (a) Increase political commitment and support the implementation of existing international agreements; enable integrative governance to ensure policy coherence and effectiveness; promote a more holistic approach and strengthen policies that build on the many interlinkages among relevant Goals and targets to ensure multi-scaled progress towards achieving all Goals;
- (b) Strengthen social protection floors, including through sustainable food and nutrition systems, access to education and universal health care; provide demand-led recovery measures such as universal social protection systems to act as social and economic stabilizers in times of economic downturns;
- (c) Protect workers and families hit hard by the economic implications of the COVID-19 pandemic through rapid and decisive national and international coordinated policy responses, which are needed to mitigate the worst effects on society and the economy;
- (d) Maintain human rights standards and principles as cornerstones for developing actions in relation to all science- and health-related targets, including advocating for vaccines and medicine to be made accessible to all as a fundamental component of the right to health and to fight global pandemics such as COVID-19;
- (e) Increase access to information and knowledge about global health issues such as COVID-19 through open access to science and research; support a free flow of quality and reliable information as a means of combatting false information; and ensure that those without digital access can be provided with the information through radio or other means of communication;
- (f) Prioritize assistance for countries experiencing protracted crises that are often the result of the combination of multiple drivers, including conflict, natural disasters and climate change; take immediate action to alleviate hunger, malnutrition and suffering, and medium- to long-term action to build resilience; avoid impoverishment; and address the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition;
- (g) Foster communication and cooperation among actors along the food distribution chain to improve logistics, handling and planning, both inside countries and across borders;
- (h) Engage migrant and diaspora communities in the planning of policies and programmes that link migration and development;
- (i) Promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as a critical accelerator for all Goals; eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres; strengthen accountability for the implementation of commitments on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; match commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls with adequate financing, through the mobilization of financial resources;
- (j) Invest in children, including early childhood development, health, child protection systems and tools; provide children, adolescents and youth with a nurturing environment for the full realization of their rights and capabilities; and support countries to reap the demographic dividend;
- (k) Promote and support integrated management and sustainable use of natural resources such as terrestrial environments, forests, watersheds, marine environments, oceans and marine systems; and improve freshwater management, protection and connectivity;
- (l) Accelerate investment in ocean sciences so as to increase scientific and technical capacity globally for observing, assessing and delivering solutions for

decision makers to reverse the decline in ocean health and catalyse new opportunities for sustainable ocean use;

(m) Emphasize the critical role of forests, trees and sustainable forest management in achieving the Goals and in solutions to global challenges, including poverty eradication, climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity loss, water scarcity and pollution, lack of food security and nutrition, land degradation and drought, dust and sandstorms, and the increased risk of natural disasters;

(n) Reiterate the essential role of biodiversity in achieving the 2030 Agenda and support the development of a post-2020 global biodiversity framework;

(o) Decouple economic activity from unsustainable resource use and negative environmental impacts and develop enabling economic policies and incentives to accelerate the transition to economies that protect biodiversity and ecosystem services, are low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive;

(p) Accelerate long-term investment in resilient infrastructure for sustainable development, including through public investment and incentives for the private sector, increased investment in risk management and preparedness, enhanced regulatory frameworks and a strengthened international financial safety net and framework for debt sustainability;

(q) Build sustainable cities that address critical needs while conserving nature, restoring biodiversity, maintaining and enhancing ecosystem services;

(r) Scale up finance solutions for climate-resilient infrastructure and economic development at local levels; increase renewable energy investments through support to sound enabling policy frameworks, development of bankable projects, risk mitigation instruments and matchmaking;

(s) Provide increased, wide-scale and collaborative assistance to least developed countries, small island developing States, landlocked developing countries and countries with economies in transition;

(t) Capitalize on technological innovations to reduce, respond to and recover from disasters; build on regional actions and systems to address the transboundary nature of disasters;

(u) Develop a shared vision and framework for inclusive digital economies that leave no one behind, contribute to achieving the Goals, mobilize investment capital and technical support, and create tools to measure inclusiveness;

(v) Prioritize and increase public investments, such as technical, human and financial resources, in population data systems, including the 2020 round of censuses, so as to provide the most robust basis for data disaggregation, bearing in mind that high-quality geospatial data and new estimation methods offer new tools for identifying inequalities and better distributing national services to improve access to basic services;

(w) Promote inclusive debate on frontier technologies and improve foresight and technological assessment. The international community needs to advance its understanding of risks and benefits, as well as policy options to steer innovation in ways that leave no one behind. Countries are encouraged to undertake strategic foresight and technological assessment initiatives to enhance the socioeconomic and environmental implications of new and innovative technologies;

(x) Strengthen normative frameworks related to frontier technologies. Alongside major opportunities for sustainable and inclusive development, frontier technologies can also give rise to issues relating to citizens' rights, privacy, data ownership and online security;

(y) Promote new financial instruments to harness the potential of digital innovations for the financing of the Goals, including digital financing platforms, innovative digital services, digitization of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and domestic resource mobilization;

(z) Ensure more inclusive development programmes that provide accessibility and opportunities to all relevant stakeholders in a whole-of-society framework, including academia, non-governmental organizations, civil society and youth, while enabling women and their inclusion in all levels of decision making;

(aa) Harness the potential of technology and innovation to improve the lives of women and girls and to close the development divide and the digital divide;

(bb) Close data and evidence gaps through improved and regular collection, analysis and use of gender statistics to strengthen the implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes;

(cc) Strengthen international cooperation, including North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, as well as public-private partnerships, to implement commitments to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls;

(dd) Increase efforts to engage the private sector in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with enhanced partnerships to reinforce policy and technical coherence between the public and private sectors;

(ee) Invest in effective responses to prevent and counter crime in all its forms and manifestations; ensure inclusive dialogue on all aspects of crime prevention and criminal justice; and provide technical assistance and capacity-building;

(ff) Foster a culture of inclusion in and across education systems so as to reach all learners, from the early years, and prioritizing the most disadvantaged and vulnerable; improve legal, policy and planning frameworks to advance rights and tackle harmful social norms and attitudes that underlie exclusion in education; include vulnerable migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons in national education systems and ensure continuity of education in conflict and crisis-affected situations;

(gg) Increase adaptability of education and training systems to improve the employability of youth and equip young people and adults with skills for the twenty-first century – which have to be transferable – in a lifelong perspective;

(hh) Ensure that all learners have access to relevant and responsive digital learning environments regardless of learners' disabilities, social or economic status or geographic location;

(ii) Increase domestic financing for public expenditure in education, notably through broadening the tax base, tax reform, anti-corruption measures, as well as by tackling illicit financial flows;

(jj) Increase international financing to meet the benchmark of 0.7 per cent of gross national product and allocate at least 10 per cent of that to education, matching development assistance with countries that are farthest behind and strengthening coordination among actors;

(kk) Strengthen the capacities of Governments and national institutions to accommodate technological advancement;

(ll) Further national digital agendas that support closing the digital divide in relation to access and skills through appropriate information and communications technologies and infrastructure, and improving users' capabilities, especially those of vulnerable groups, youth, women and girls;

(mm) Promote skills development policies that are relevant to rapid technological change in terms of lifelong learning, entrepreneurship training, upgrading of skills for innovators and capacity-building for researchers;

(nn) Support innovation by creating financing mechanisms and other programmes to support the adoption by business of new technologies; disseminate their application; and share examples of successful business models;

(oo) Support capacity-building efforts to assist Governments and companies in their efforts to provide and collect data on performance and company impacts that are related to the Goals;

(pp) Promote the appreciation of culture as a positive resource and a means for strengthening inclusion, participation and human resilience, especially in times of great inequality, uncertainty and fear;

(qq) Build capacities to facilitate the use, dissemination, adoption, adaptation and development of technologies and innovative solutions for achieving the Goals and for achieving national development goals;

(rr) Invest in data and statistics for the Goals; and strengthen statistical capacities to address gaps in data in order to allow countries to provide high-quality, timely, reliable, disaggregated data and statistics and to fully integrate the Goals in monitoring and reporting systems;

(ss) Provide reliable data infrastructure related to migration and sustainable development for future policy implementations;

(tt) Support the establishment of an innovative financing mechanism to mobilize both domestic and international funds to help governments strengthen data capacity and build sustainable statistical systems;

(uu) Foster open-source data analytics platforms to easily access, process and analyse large datasets, so that country capacities to integrate into national monitoring frameworks can be strengthened;

(vv) Strengthen the importance of sustainable investment in data collection; exchange and use data to underpin science, technology and innovation-based services;

(ww) As the United Nations approaches its seventy-fifth anniversary, renew the commitment to multilateral rules and institutions; and engage in reforming them to advance the Goals and ensure a global transition towards equitable and sustainable development.

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