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Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Right to food

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the interim report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Hilal Elver, submitted pursuant to Assembly resolution [73/171](#).

* [A/74/50](#).



Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food

Summary

The present report focuses on the Sustainable Development Goals, the cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as a potentially transformative tool to advance the realization of the right to food, as well as other economic, social and cultural rights. Despite not explicitly recognizing the right to food, the promise of the Goals to leave no one behind in the pursuit of human rights for all reflects the principles of equality and non-discrimination. Inequality, and the inequitable distribution of food and productive resources, remains a significant barrier to the realization of the right to food, especially for populations that have been historically and structurally left behind. Engaging these populations in the policy process and implementing the Goals from a holistic, human rights-based approach will revitalize efforts to eliminate hunger and malnutrition and enable the universal enjoyment of the right to food.

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I. Introduction

1. The realization of the right to food is essential for achieving the ambitious objectives set forth in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015 and signed by 193 countries, the 2030 Agenda is intended to guide global development efforts from 2016 to 2030 through the Sustainable Development Goals. The Goals are a compilation of 17 goals and 169 targets that represent a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

2. The Goals do not explicitly recognize the human right to adequate food, as set forth in article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and further elaborated in article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Instead, the Goals seek to realize the human rights of all and promise that no one will be left behind – an allusion to the human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination. This promise imposes no legal obligation on States, but is highly relevant to the right to food: inequality and, specifically, inequitable distribution of food and productive resources, remains one of the most significant barriers to the realization of the right to food and the enjoyment of other economic, social and cultural rights.

3. The right to food extends beyond productivism, the paradigm in which Goal 2 (zero hunger) is rooted. Realizing this right requires tackling the historical and structural inequalities that undermine availability, adequacy, accessibility and sustainability of food systems.¹ The right to food therefore requires considering all the Goals, which collectively seek to empower those who have been left behind. States, as the primary duty bearers, must create environments conducive to the enjoyment of the right to food. Prioritizing the Goals and breaking down the silos that separate them will allow for more inclusive, balanced participation among policymakers, scientists, academics, civil society and private sector actors.

4. Unfortunately, the Goals are not on track to achieve their full potential and the most affected populations are those who experience the greatest inequality and marginalization, particularly women, children, indigenous peoples, peasants and migrant communities. There are significant divergences in implementation of the Goals across regions and among countries, but the world's most vulnerable groups are at the greatest risk of being left behind. As of 2019, the Asia-Pacific region is reported as stalling on more than half of the Goals, having made little or no progress on ending hunger.² Hunger has also remained prevalent in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, where nearly 9 in 10 of the world's extreme poor will live by 2030.³

5. Globally, hunger has risen since 2015 affecting more than 820 million people.⁴ Adult obesity rates have increased each year and fewer than 5 per cent of countries are on track to meet goals to address childhood obesity. Hidden hunger, or micronutrient deficiencies, affects millions of people, including the 151 million

¹ According to the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), José Graziano da Silva, realizing the right to food means empowering people to feed themselves and their families in dignity. It means ensuring that all children, women and men everywhere have access to the healthy diets they need to reach and sustain their full potential.

² Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific, *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2019* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.II.F.9), p. 2.

³ The World Bank, "Poverty overview" (www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview).

⁴ FAO and others, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019: Safeguarding against Economic Slowdowns and Downturns* (Rome, 2019), p. 3.

children under 5 who experienced stunted growth in 2017.⁵ Conflicts and climate change-induced weather events further intensify human suffering, create unprecedented displacement and cause rapid deterioration of land and water ecosystems. These drivers impede sustainable development efforts and exacerbate inequality.

6. These trends do not suggest that the 2030 Agenda is entirely broken or designed to fail; only that the potential for the Sustainable Development Goals to significantly advance the right to food remains unfulfilled. If the 2030 Agenda is implemented holistically and from a human rights-based approach, it is capable of advancing all economic, social and cultural rights. The present report advocates for greater cooperation among stakeholders, with particular attention to groups that have been left behind, in order to develop policies under the Goals that tackle inequalities and other barriers to the right to food. Realizing the right to food requires States to transform the promise to leave no one behind into concrete policies aligned with human rights law; to demonstrate the political will and financial commitment to address weaknesses in the process to implement the Goals; and to prioritize solutions to the global drivers of hunger and malnutrition above nationalist policies.

II. Leaving too many behind: using the Sustainable Development Goals to address inequalities that undermine the right to food

A. Defining “leave no one behind”

7. The cross-cutting principle of leaving no one behind is considered to be one of the most transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda, as it integrates the fundamental human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. If applied meaningfully, this voluntary pledge “will ensure that human rights are at the heart of development practices and that those furthest behind are at the forefront of planning, processes and interventions.”⁶ However, in the absence of a clear priority and precise targets within the Goals, States have struggled to operationalize this promise into concrete policy action.

8. Securing equitable access to adequate food for all requires an overarching development strategy that calls for transformative change to economic, social and political systems. Human rights law obligates States to provide food and fill the nutritional needs of different groups, and to guarantee that the poorest and most marginalized have the opportunity to fulfil their development potential.⁷ Policy reforms taken pursuant to the Goals should focus on barriers to the right to food, expanding opportunities for civil society to engage in food system governance and adopting legal protections that eliminate inequality and exclusion.

⁵ United Nations Children’s Fund, World Health Organization and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, *Levels and Trends in Child Malnutrition: Key Findings of the 2018 Edition of the Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates* (Geneva, 2018).

⁶ Bond, “Leave no one behind: how the development community is realising the pledge” (London, January 2018), p. 4.

⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “The right to adequate food”, fact sheet No. 34 (Geneva, 2010), p. 20.

B. Tackling economic inequality within and between countries

1. Economic inequality

9. In recent years, economic inequality has reached unprecedented levels. In 2017, global wealth increased by 3.1 per cent,⁸ but approximately 82 per cent of this growth benefited the wealthiest 1 per cent of the population, which now controls as much wealth as the other 99 per cent combined. The bottom 50 per cent saw no increase.⁹ More than 2 billion people still live in poverty, with 736 million living in extreme poverty. Over the past half century, climate change has exacerbated global inequality between countries by 25 per cent.¹⁰ As the rich get richer, the number of people living on less than \$1.90 per day could begin to rise by 2050.¹¹

10. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that zero hunger (Goal 2) and poverty reduction (Goal 1) must be tackled together. A human-centric vision of the Goals gives high priority to the more than 2.5 billion people who depend on agriculture for both subsistence and their livelihoods. But the right to food also requires dispersing wealth to close the inequality gap within and among countries (Goal 10) and between individuals (Goal 5).¹² The 2007–2008 global financial crisis revealed how concentrated wealth deteriorates the sustainability of food systems: transnational corporations dominating agribusiness and the food sector converted economic wealth into direct political influence over national and international food policies that failed to safeguard the needs and rights of the most vulnerable.¹³

11. Cuts to fuel and food subsidies, rising food prices, corruption and austerity measures that exacerbate wealth inequality have stirred recent unrest and humanitarian crises around the world, including in Haiti, the Sudan, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and Zimbabwe. Violations of civil and political rights have also accentuated a decline of economic and social rights in the global north. For example, the “gilets jaunes” recently protested their exclusion from economic rights and public affairs in France;¹⁴ in the United States of America, failure to guarantee or even recognize the human right to political participation is linked to poverty and criminalization of the poor (see [A/HRC/38/33/Add.1](#)).

2. Redistributing wealth and fiscal policies

12. Goal 10 is one of the most striking elements of the 2030 Agenda, representing a formal commitment to address income inequality, social and political power imbalances, unfair fiscal and wage policies, financial regulation and governance of the global economy. The Goal further encourages States to adopt fiscal, wage and social protection policies to progressively achieve greater equality. Implementing fiscal policies that redistribute wealth will help to reallocate power and promote

⁸ International Food Policy Research Institute, *Global Food Policy Report 2019* (Washington, D.C., 2019), p. 8.

⁹ Oxfam International, “Reward work, not wealth (Oxford, January 2018), p. 8.

¹⁰ Noah S. Diffenbaugh and Marshall Burke, “Global warming has increased global economic inequality” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, vol. 116, No. 20 (May 2019).

¹¹ Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, “Goalkeepers: the stories behind the data 2018”, p. 5.

¹² Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR), “From disparity to dignity: tackling economic inequality through the Sustainable Development Goals, Human Rights Policy Brief (New York, 2016), p. 8.

¹³ Felipe Bley Folly and others, “Echoes from below: peoples’ social struggles as an antidote to a ‘human rights crisis’” in *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch: the World Food Crisis – the Way Out* (Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition, September 2017), p. 30.

¹⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, address to the Human Rights Council, 6 March 2019.

greater access within food systems, especially for the world's poor, as redistribution via taxation or reallocation of existing spending may resolve over 75 per cent of global poverty.¹⁵

13. Progressive tax systems, including direct income and property taxes that support social protection transfers and public services, may have a significant redistributive impact.¹⁶ Taxing the top earners at a higher rate and spending the revenue collected for goods and public services essential for economic and social rights has proven successful in some developed countries. In Finland, 34 per cent of the population would have been in relative poverty in 2015 in the absence of direct taxes and transfers, instead of 6.3 per cent.¹⁷ Progressive fiscal policies have had a lesser impact on inequality in developing countries, although results vary by country.

14. Financing health through progressive tax systems benefits poorer householders (A/71/304, para. 30), as does closing loopholes in existing tax policies and redirecting resources to those who rely on State-run, comprehensive food, health and education programmes and social protections. States should address austerity policies that reduce the space for public interventions and significantly affect citizens' access to public goods.¹⁸ Such policy solutions were the focus of the integration segment at the Economic and Social Council in July 2019, on the theme "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality" following the presentation of voluntary national reviews from nearly 50 countries.

15. Despite its potential, Goal 10 remains vulnerable to strategic neglect and is more likely to be overlooked by policymakers. Among its shortfalls is the absence of a target to reduce the unequal distribution of income and wealth and an indicator that would show whether a country's level of economic inequality has declined by 2030. The leading target on inequality (target 10.1) focuses on the bottom 40 per cent of the population, neglecting the "missing middle" and ignoring the reality of many developed countries where recent growth has accrued in the top 1 per cent of the income bracket. States should rely on the widely used Gini coefficient or the more effective Palma ratio, which measure pre-tax and post-social transfers, to capture the full distributive impacts of fiscal policies.

3. Expanding social protection systems

16. The right to food requires States to proactively strengthen people's access to resources and means to ensure their livelihood, including by adopting social protection mechanisms. The Special Rapporteur has addressed the importance of social protections, especially for agricultural and fishery workers, who are among the world's poorest (A/73/164, para. 21 and A/HRC/40/56, para. 24). Social protections also benefit societies as a whole (see A/65/259). An estimated 36 per cent of the "very poor" have escaped extreme poverty as a result of social safety nets, including cash, in-kind transfers, social pensions, public works and school feeding programmes.¹⁹ These programmes have reduced the poverty gap by nearly half in developing countries.²⁰

¹⁵ Chris Hoy and Andy Sumner, "Gasoline, guns, and giveaways: is there new capacity for redistribution to end three quarters of global poverty?", Working Paper No. 433 (Washington, D.C., Center for Global Development, August 2016), p. 2.

¹⁶ CESR, "From Disparity to Dignity", p. 20.

¹⁷ *Promoting Inclusion through Social Protection: Report on the World Social Situation 2018* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.17.IV.2), p. 15.

¹⁸ Stephan Backes and others, "Democracy not for sale: the struggle for food sovereignty in the age of austerity in Greece" (Amsterdam, Heidelberg and Athens/Thessaloniki, Transnational Institute, FIAN International and Agroecopolis, November 2018).

¹⁹ The World Bank, "Safety nets", updated 28 March 2019 (www.worldbank.org/en/topic/safetynets).

²⁰ Ariel Fiszbein, Ravi Kanbur and Ruslan Yemtsov, "Social protection and poverty reduction: global patterns and some targets", *World Development*, vol. 61 (September 2014), pp. 167–177.

17. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, many countries have significantly expanded and reinforced social protection coverage consistent with Sustainable Development Goal targets 1.3 and 10.4 and established effective social protection floors consistent with International Labour Organization (ILO) Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202).²¹ Tax-financed social assistance programmes have had the most marked impact on inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa and have caused the greatest equalizing effect in Eastern European and Central Asian countries when combined with social insurance.²² These social protection schemes do more than address poverty itself, they address the risk of poverty.

18. Still, less than half of the world's population is effectively protected by legally enforceable social protections and coverage is often limited by inadequate implementation, enforcement or institutional capacity.²³ Only 3 per cent and 24 per cent of the extreme poor in low- and middle-income countries are covered by social insurance and social assistance programmes respectively, and about 83 per cent of Africa's rural population is not protected by a national health system.²⁴

19. Removing existing social protections may cause measurable harm even in countries with a high concentration of wealth and where the rights to food and health have been realized by most of the population. Despite the historic success of the Zero Hunger programme in Brazil, for example, social protection rollbacks between 2015 and 2017 affected 1.5 million families and contributed to the resurgence of poverty levels from eight years prior.²⁵ Greece's financial crises and neo-liberal austerity measures dismantled the country's already-inadequate social protection system, contributing to unprecedented levels of poverty and inequality.²⁶ The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty recently observed the impacts of major cuts to social welfare programmes and high levels of dangerous, low-paid work in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, where 14 million people, one fifth of the population, are living in poverty (see [A/HRC/41/39/Add.1](#)).

C. Empowering and engaging groups experiencing heightened inequality

20. Inequality is not limited to financial wealth, but encompasses socioeconomic, cultural and political discrimination that affects an individual's ability to enjoy a wide range of human rights. Accordingly, in target 10.2 of Goal 10, States are encouraged to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all,

²¹ More than 20 countries have achieved near-universal coverage in old-age pensions and social security coverage has been progressively expanded in Brazil, Cabo Verde, China, Ghana, India, Mexico, Mozambique, South Africa and Thailand. ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2017–19: Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals* (International Labour Office, Geneva, 2017), p. 7.

²² *Report on the World Social Situation 2018*, pp. 11 and 12.

²³ ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2017–19*, p. 9.

²⁴ Andrew Mundalo Allieu, "Implementing nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all: gaps and challenges facing rural areas", paper presented at the Department of Economic and Social Affairs expert group meeting on eradicating rural poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda, Addis Ababa, 27 February–1 March 2019.

²⁵ Letter to Brazil from the Special Rapporteurs on the right to food; on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment; on the rights of indigenous peoples; and on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation (22 February 2019).

²⁶ Sofia Adam and Christos Papatheodorou, "Dismantling the feeble social protection system of Greece: consequences of the crisis and austerity measures", in *Challenges to European Welfare Systems*, Klaus Shubert, Palmoa de Villota and Johanna Kuhlmann, eds. (Springer International Publishing, 2016).

irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. These discriminations are often a source of tension and conflict within society.

21. As a result of the lack of legal protections, women and girls, children and youth, peasants and other rural communities, indigenous peoples and migrants, who are integral to global food systems but have been structurally left behind, face persistent, institutionalized discrimination and increased vulnerability to hunger in disaster and conflict settings. Adopting strategic policies that empower and engage these groups will help them to secure access to adequate food and support the realization of human rights.

1. Women

22. Women substantially contribute to sustainable food systems and global strategies to eliminate poverty, hunger and malnutrition, yet they account for 70 per cent of the world's hungry and are more likely to experience food and nutrition insecurity.²⁷ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women sets out comprehensive obligations of States to promote gender equality and empower women and girls. The Goals offer additional guidance for guaranteeing women's enjoyment of their rights. While achieving gender equality is the direct focus of Goal 5, the concept is reflected in 36 targets and 45 indicators throughout the Goals.

23. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policy areas will enable States to address the power imbalances that result in gender-based discrimination and violence; restricted access to land ownership, tenure and basic services; precarious and unpaid work; a lack of education; and barriers to justice (see [A/HRC/31/51](#)). The Sustainable Development Goals promote more equitable access to land and productive resources for women and girls as a critical component of gender equality (target 5.a) and a precondition to achieving zero hunger and malnutrition (target 2.3). If granted the same resource access as men, women could increase yields on their farms by 20–30 per cent, which could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4 per cent per annum and reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12–17 per cent.²⁸

24. To realize this potential, however, States need to remove restrictive and discriminatory laws and customs that perpetuate inequality between men and women. Target 5.a advocates for reforms to give women access to ownership, tenure, financial services and natural resources, but only in accordance with national laws. Owing to discriminatory policies and practices, women account for less than 13 per cent of landholders despite comprising 43 per cent of agricultural labourers, and many women producers are uncompensated or otherwise lack market opportunities.²⁹

25. States should embrace a bolder interpretation of Goal 5, one that emphasizes gender equality as a precondition for political empowerment, economic opportunity, physical safety, equal pay, individual freedom of choice and the right to food.³⁰ The Sustainable Development Goal framework promotes a view of gender equality that is too limiting, failing to mention women in goals relating to forests, desertification and

²⁷ FAO, "Voices of the hungry" (2015–2017 three-year averages). See also the reports of the Special Rapporteur on women ([A/HRC/31/51](#), paras. 4 and 5), conflict ([A/72/188](#)), climate change ([A/70/287](#), paras. 35–37), and disasters ([A/HRC/37/61](#), paras. 47–52).

²⁸ FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010–11: Women in Agriculture – Closing the Gender Gap for Development* (Rome, 2011), p. 5.

²⁹ United Nations Development Programme, "Gender equality strategy 2018–2021", p. 4.

³⁰ Statement by the High Commissioner for Human Rights on 16 January 2019 (see [A/HRC/40/34](#), para. 12).

land degradation (Goal 14) or oceans and fisheries (Goal 15).³¹ Goal 13 on climate change also fails to recognize the heightened vulnerability of women and girls engaged in food production ([A/70/287](#)).

26. Adopting gender-responsive economic policies will help to address women's disproportionate burden of unpaid work, including informal employment in the agriculture sector (target 5.4), guarantee decent employment (Goal 8) and close the gender wage gap – currently at 23 per cent, all of which undermine women's right to food.³² Young women should also be able to secure employment that allows maternity leave and opportunities to breastfeed according to World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations.³³

27. Increasing women's representation in decision-making at all levels (target 5.5) starts with expanding educational opportunities for adolescent girls (Goal 4). Empowering women of all ages to engage in policy processes improves not only women's health, but also intergenerational nutrition.³⁴ In Ethiopia, the successful engagement of women and their representation in food and nutrition policies has improved nutrition for every household member.³⁵ Still, many countries have yet to achieve gender equality, which is critical for the right to food.

2. Children

28. Realizing the right to food for children requires States to focus on the structural and root causes of inequality that mutually reinforce hunger and malnutrition. Poverty is a driving force behind the estimated 108 million children who work in the agricultural sector and who are susceptible to physical and mental trauma and heightened risks of human and labour rights violations (see [A/73/164](#)). The Convention on the Rights of the Child and several ILO conventions establish specific protections, but many children from indigenous, low income, rural and migrant communities, and adolescent girls, still engage in the informal agricultural economy in order to support their family's livelihood.

29. The 2030 Agenda directly references children in 35 targets, including those under Goal 2 concerning the double burden of malnutrition. Investments in education can promote better nutrition, health (Goal 3) and responsible investment and consumption (Goal 12) for children. Impediments to education, including child labour, geographic isolation and irregular migration status, increase the risk of poverty and reduce access to adequate food later in life. Children are more likely to have low academic performance without food and nutrition security.³⁶ Protracted conflicts that drive hunger and malnutrition further hinder access to education (see [A/72/188](#)). By April 2016, an estimated 5,000 schools in the Syrian Arab Republic

³¹ Bina Agarwal, "Gender equality, food security and the Sustainable Development Goals", *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, vol. 34 (October 2018), pp. 26–32.

³² [A/HRC/31/51](#), paras. 4 and 5. See also [A/72/188](#), [A/70/287](#) and [A/HRC/37/61](#).

³³ See Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 15 (2013) on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, art. 24 ([CRC/C/GC/15](#)).

³⁴ Concept note for the international conference on "Leaving no one behind: making the case for adolescent girls", hosted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Save the Children, Rome, 22 and 23 October 2018.

³⁵ United States Agency for International Development and Save the Children "Improving nutrition through multisectoral support: the ENGINE experience", Empowering the New Generation to Improve Nutrition and Economic opportunities (ENGINE) final report, 2011–2016).

³⁶ Tomaso Ferrando, "From marginalization to integration: universal, free and sustainable meals in Italian school canteens as expressions of the right to education and the right to food", Law Research Paper Series No. 003 (University of Bristol, 2019).

were fully destroyed from conflict and over 60 per cent of Syrian refugee children did not have access to education.³⁷

30. In an age of industrialized agriculture, easy access to cheap, processed foods which are high in sugar, salt and fat, is contributing to all forms of malnutrition and the spread of non-communicable diseases among children. Some States are taking steps under Goal 2 and WHO recommendations to regulate the food industry by removing processed foods from school vending machines; introducing nutrition-sensitive school feeding programmes, labelling initiatives and advertising restrictions; and adopting economic measures for imported food and drinks classified as “unhealthy”. Still, such measures are sporadic, and States need to embrace a more active regulatory role to monitor and enforce industry compliance.

31. As the world’s farmers are ageing and migrating to urban centres, engaging educated youth in the formal agricultural sector, consistent with human rights law and ILO standards, will support agricultural development and poverty reduction (an issue that the Committee on World Food Security will discuss in its next programme of work). Nearly 1 billion of the world’s 1.2 billion young people aged 15–24 reside in developing countries, and half of them live in rural areas.³⁸ States should ensure that these youth populations have access to productive resources, land, credit and adequate social protections.

3. Rural communities and peasants

32. Urban migration has shifted the demographic landscape, warranting actions to make cities safer, more resilient and sustainable (Goal 11). Nevertheless, realizing the right to food requires special attention to rural communities, where roughly 50 per cent of the world’s population lives, a proportion that is expected to increase to 60 per cent by 2030.³⁹ Rural populations account for an overwhelming 79 per cent of the extreme poor.⁴⁰ The prevalence of rural stunting is 26.8 per cent as compared with 19.2 per cent in urban areas,⁴¹ and rural poverty rates are more than three times higher than in cities.⁴²

33. These trends are global: 413 million of the world’s poor live in Africa, where nearly 60 per cent of the population is rural;⁴³ 111.6 million Europeans, or 23.5 per cent of the population, are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and rural poverty is 3.5 per cent higher than urban poverty in the United States;⁴⁴ large pockets of rural poverty also exist in Asia and Latin America. FAO recently launched its strategy known as “100 hunger-free territories” to focus on the most vulnerable rural territories

³⁷ Leila Zerrougui, “Harnessing the potential of boys and girls to fulfil the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals” in *UN Chronicle: Implementing the 2030 Agenda – the Challenge of Conflict*, vol. LII, No. 4, 2015 (New York, April 2016).

³⁸ IFAD, *2019 Rural Development Report: Creating Opportunities for Rural Youth* (Rome, 2019), p. 14.

³⁹ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E18.I.6), p. 15.

⁴⁰ World Bank, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2018: Piecing Together the Poverty Puzzle* (Washington, D.C., International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2018), p. 38.

⁴¹ International Food Policy Research Institute, *Global Food Policy Report 2019*, p. 7.

⁴² David Suttie, “Overview: rural poverty in developing countries – issues, policies and challenges”, paper presented at the Department of Economic and Social Affairs expert group meeting on eradicating rural poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda, Addis Ababa, 27 February–1 March 2019, p. 1.

⁴³ Suttie, “Overview: rural poverty in developing countries”.

⁴⁴ Paola Bertolini, “Overview of income and non-income rural poverty in developed countries”, available at www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2019/03/bertolini-presentation-on-rural-poverty-developed-countries-2.pdf.

in the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Peru and other Latin American and Caribbean countries.

34. Most rural communities rely on farming, crop production, fisheries and aquaculture for their livelihoods, yet the privatization of seeds, genetic information (through sequencing and patents) and new biotechnologies such as gene drives through intellectual property regimes threaten these practices. The recently adopted United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas reinforces the obligation for States to provide inclusive, unobstructed access to productive resources for rural populations, consistent with the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing. Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women provides additional guidance on resource access for rural women.

35. The Sustainable Development Goals reflect the importance of access to land for poverty reduction, including land that is tenured communally (indicator 1.4.2). The Committee on World Food Security has encouraged States to value economies based on collective and customary resource management and food production as part of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security. In Mali, for example, the law on agricultural lands recognizes collective tenure rights with the same legitimacy as private property rights.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, this is not widespread, and communities without private land ownership are at risk of dispossession ([A/HRC/40/56](#), para. 47).

36. The United Nations Decade of Family Farming has highlighted the need for revitalization to break cycles of rural poverty and address discriminatory norms. States should consider linking social insurance to people rather than formal employment contracts and make social protection more affordable and attractive to rural populations by adjusting contributions (see [A/73/164](#)).⁴⁶ Strengthening institutional links between rural producers and cities and expanding market opportunities for smallholders will further enable rural populations to benefit from urbanization.⁴⁷ The Committee on World Food Security recommends providing fair and transparent price information so smallholders may make an informed decision on what, when and where to produce and sell.⁴⁸

37. Public and private investments in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services have proven effective in reducing rural poverty and promoting economic inclusion. Goal 2 (target 2.A) calls for these strategies in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries. States need to restructure policies that reinforce inequality, such as those that favour large-scale land acquisitions over small-farm development and make sure that infrastructural investments reach the most isolated areas, which tend to be more disaster-prone and where hunger and malnutrition are more severe.⁴⁹

38. Efforts to revitalize rural communities will ultimately fail if States continue to invest in large-scale, industrialized agriculture that is a leading source of greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation and a major driver of inequality, hunger and malnutrition (see [A/70/287](#)). Goal 2 (target 2.4) calls for States to invest in more

⁴⁵ Mohamed Coulibaly, “Historic new law secures land for Malian farmers” (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 15 June 2017).

⁴⁶ Allieu, “Implementing nationally appropriate social protection systems”, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Suttie, “Overview: rural poverty in developing countries”.

⁴⁸ Committee on World Food Security, “Connecting smallholders to markets: policy recommendations”, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Ana Paula de la O Campos and others, *Ending Extreme Poverty in Rural Areas: Sustaining Livelihoods to Leave No One Behind* (Rome, FAO, 2018), p. 15.

inclusive, resilient and sustainable food systems and agricultural practices, consistent with greater action on climate change (Goal 13). States should invest in agroecology, which has emerged as a key solution to enhance food security and which provides an overarching political framework that highlights the connection between locally adapted agricultural systems and the right to food (see [A/HRC/34/48](#)).⁵⁰

4. Indigenous peoples

39. Many of the world's 370 million indigenous people have historically experienced serious injustice and discrimination that undermines their right to food.⁵¹ Despite making up only 5 per cent of the population, indigenous people account for 15 per cent of the extreme poor.⁵² Still, indigenous peoples have been overlooked in the Sustainable Development Goal framework and implementation process. Of the 43 voluntary national reviews presented in 2017, only 11 referred to indigenous peoples as the subject of strategies to eliminate group-based discrimination and exclusion.⁵³ While Goal 2 (target 2.3) calls for States to promote secure and equal access to land and other productive resources for small-scale food producers, particularly indigenous peoples, there is only one other reference to this population in the remaining 168 targets. Only 4 out of 230 indicators specifically mention indigenous peoples, including one that contains a financial measure of wealth but fails to account for the value of land, territory and resource rights.⁵⁴

40. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples specifically recognizes the importance of natural resources for indigenous people who rely on subsistence agriculture, hunting and gathering for their livelihoods and cultural identity. Indigenous people have helped to sustain fragile ecosystems, such as tropical forests, rangelands and large-scale rotational agricultural systems.⁵⁵ Yet, investments in resource extraction, mining and even so-called sustainable development projects designed to adapt to climate change under Goals 7 and 13, fail to respect the indigenous peoples' right to give or withhold their free, prior and informed consent, and often displace them from traditional lands ([A/70/287](#), para. 68).

41. Indigenous people living in rural areas should have equitable access to tools and the resources necessary to support food production and access to markets, consistent with those protections extended to non-indigenous rural communities. This includes ownership or secure rights to land for women and girls (target 5.A) and recognition of rights based on collective land tenure and resource systems. Indigenous peoples should also have opportunities to maintain genetic diversity of seeds and access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic

⁵⁰ Committee on World Food Security, High-level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, "Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition" (Rome, 2019).

⁵¹ FAO, Indigenous People's Team, "Indigenous peoples and their right to food" (internal document), p. 2.

⁵² "Inclusion, equality and empowerment to achieve sustainable development: realities of indigenous peoples", report by the indigenous peoples major group for the high-level political forum of the Economic and Social Council, July 2019, available at <https://www.indigenouspeoples-sdg.org/index.php/english/>.

⁵³ Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and Thea Smaavik Hegstad, "'Leaving no one behind' as a site of contestation and reinterpretation", Background Paper No. 47 for the Committee for Development Policy (ST/ESA/2018/CDP/47), p. 7.

⁵⁴ Galina Angarova, Tebtebba Foundation and Roberto Borrero, International Indian Treaty Council, global organizing partners for the indigenous peoples major group, Paper submitted to the high-level political forum of the Economic and Social Council, p. 5.

⁵⁵ FAO, Indigenous People's Team, "Indigenous peoples and their right to food" (internal document), p. 5.

resources and associated traditional knowledge, as is generally promised in Goal 2 and reflected in international law.

42. Strengthening the capacity for food-system and agricultural adaptation to climate change, extreme weather and other disasters (target 2.4), will require States to value indigenous peoples' knowledge and practices that have successfully promoted biodiversity and ecosystem health (A/HRC/36/46, para. 22). As custodians of 80 per cent of the world's remaining biodiversity, indigenous people are in a unique position to respond to the impacts of climate change, but they are also on the front lines of climate-induced natural disasters and conflicts (see A/HRC/37/61). Closing the education gap and expanding opportunities for decent work, which ILO has stated should align with the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), will help strengthen indigenous peoples' resilience to these shocks.⁵⁶

5. Migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons

43. Populations migrating voluntarily or in response to economic shocks, conflict, poverty, natural disasters or climate change experience heightened inequality and unparalleled hurdles to the right to food. There are 763 million individuals who moved within the boundaries of their country of origin,⁵⁷ including a record 41.3 million who are currently internally displaced because of conflict and violence.⁵⁸ An additional 25.9 million refugees fled their countries to escape conflict and persecution in 2018,⁵⁹ contributing to the 258 million individuals who live outside their country, up from 173 million in 2000.⁶⁰ These populations are unable to fully enjoy their right to food, as systemic inequality and discrimination contributes to severe economic exploitation, social exclusion and political invisibility (A/73/164, paras. 53–59).

44. This discrimination is apparent in the modern debate on immigration, which is characterized by misconceptions and proxy fears about unemployment, the viability of welfare systems and other aspects of globalization.⁶¹ The criminalization of migrants, especially those in irregular situations, and the resurgence of xenophobic rhetoric by Governments and political parties violate the human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination central to the 2030 Agenda's promise to leave no one behind.⁶² Fundamental rights extend to everyone, without discrimination. Any differential treatment of non-citizens by States must not be inconsistent with human rights obligations.

45. The Sustainable Development Goals reflect the duty of States to protect migrants at all stages of the migratory process (target 10.7) and to administer access to justice following discriminatory treatment or rights violations (Goal 16). In the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, States are encouraged to

⁵⁶ Rishabh Kumar Dhir, "Sustainable Development Goals: indigenous peoples in focus" (ILO, July 2016), p. 5.

⁵⁷ International Organization for Migration, "Migration in the world" (last updated 21 June 2018), available at www.iom.sk/en/migration/migration-in-the-world.html.

⁵⁸ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2019* (May 2019), p. 48.

⁵⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018* (Geneva, June 2019), p. 13.

⁶⁰ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018*, p. 15.

⁶¹ *The Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Migrants in an Irregular Situation* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.14.XIV.4), p. 12.

⁶² The Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, in its general comment No. 2 (2013) on the rights of migrant workers in an irregular situation and members of their families, and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, François Crépeau, in his statement to the General Assembly on 21 October 2011, have stated that irregular migration is not a crime.

develop clear, long-term and evidence-based policies ensuring equal human rights protection for all migrants. The Guidelines on the Applicable Criteria and Standards relating to the Detention of Asylum-Seekers and Alternatives to Detention further stipulate the provision of food of nutritional value suitable to age, health and cultural/religious background, and the availability of special diets for pregnant or breastfeeding women, regardless of migration status.

46. Guaranteeing decent work opportunities will help to reduce informal, low-wage and dangerous employment and enable migrants to feed themselves in a dignified manner. Migration may generate employment and investment opportunities through remittances that support the economic mobility of recipient households and enable internal migration to new markets with greater labour potential. Under Goal 10 (target 10.C) States are encouraged to reduce remittance transaction costs and eliminate certain remittance corridors by 2030. In the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Security, States are invited to promote efficient use of the remittances of migrants for investments that could improve their livelihoods, including the food security of their families.

47. States must provide for immediate and long-term strategies to integrate migrants into existing legal frameworks through targeted programmes with clear benchmarks and timelines. The former Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants explained that collecting data disaggregated by all prohibited grounds of discrimination will help to ensure the efficacy of such programmes (A/HRC/35/25, para. 76). Most official international and national data systems still fail to accurately account for migrants in irregular situations, despite the existence of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the ILO Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143), which apply to all migrant workers.

III. Enhancing implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: creating an enabling environment and reforming the institutional framework

48. The high-level political forum on sustainable development will meet under the auspices of the General Assembly at the level of Heads of State and Government in September 2019 for the first time since the 2030 Agenda's adoption, and will offer an opportunity to share implementation challenges. Although the summit will provide a forum for stakeholders to share best practices, obstacles to effective implementation have already been the subject of much discussion and debate.

A. Adopting a human rights-based approach

49. The 2030 Agenda's aspirational promise to realize the human rights of all is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights instruments that establish State obligations to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. Roughly 92 per cent of the 169 targets are linked to rights set out in the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the two international covenants, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which recognizes the right to food.

50. The 2030 Agenda's failure to name most economic, social and cultural rights and the single reference to human rights across all the Goals does not mean that human rights are merely incidental to them.⁶³ Rather, successfully implementing the Goals requires placing human rights at the centre of the policy process.⁶⁴ A human rights-based approach to the Goals recognizes that they must be addressed holistically as, like human rights, they are interrelated, indivisible and interlinked. This approach enables States to develop cohesive programmes and policy instruments adapted to local contexts to integrate human rights principles of participation, universality, indivisibility, equality, non-discrimination, accountability and the rule of law.

51. A human rights-based approach also reflects the understanding that the right to food and the Goals are mutually reinforcing: economic, social and cultural rights can offer a legal basis and guidance in the implementation of the Goals, and the Goals can increase support for the realization of these rights.⁶⁵ Ratifying human rights instruments is an important first step for filling gaps at the national level. States should broadly recognize their obligations as duty bearers to individuals and groups who are rights holders. Rights holders are not just passive recipients, but key actors in the Goals and are entitled to make a claim against the State when rights remain unfulfilled. Implementation of the Goals should emphasize access to justice and inclusive participation (Goal 17), which was also an important element during the preparatory process of the Sustainable Development Goals.⁶⁶

52. Human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council, the special procedures, the treaty bodies and the universal periodic review should be more systematically integrated into national planning on the Sustainable Development Goals (A/HRC/40/34, para. 23). The Special Rapporteur has worked closely with the Rome-based agencies and the Committee on World Food Security to promote the right to food as part of Goal 2. The special procedures mandate holders discussed the Goals at their twenty-fourth annual meeting. Pursuant to resolution 37/24, the Human Rights Council organized intersessional meetings to discuss the issues central to the meeting of the high-level political forum in 2019. Still, more coordinated, cohesive action between New York and Geneva is needed to ensure that Governments are utilizing their knowledge of human rights mechanisms to inform the Sustainable Development Goals process (A/HRC/40/34, para. 32).

B. Strengthening oversight and accountability

53. Owing to State resistance during the drafting process, the 2030 Agenda provides only for follow-up and review consisting of voluntary national reviews and peer-reviewed soft guidance, rather than accountability. Member States are encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational

⁶³ See 2030 Agenda, para. 7, which explicitly names the right to water and sanitation, and target 4.7, which is the only part of the Sustainable Development Goals to use the term "human rights."

⁶⁴ United Nations Sustainable Development Group, Human Rights Working Group, "The human rights-based approach to development cooperation: towards a common understanding among United Nations agencies" (2003).

⁶⁵ Christophe Golay, *No One Will be Left Behind: the Role of United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms in Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals that Seek to Realize Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, Academy Briefing No. 11 (Geneva, Geneva Academy of International Law and Human Rights, January 2018), p. 6.

⁶⁶ Statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, on "Addressing inequalities in the SDGs: a human rights imperative for effective poverty eradication" at the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, eighth session, 4 February 2014.

levels, which are country-led and country-driven, and to present findings to the high-level political forum (2030 Agenda, para. 79). There are no additional requirements pertaining to the frequency or regularity of these reviews. As a result of the limited time afforded to discussing the reviews at previous meetings of the forum and the lack of engagement with civil society, some have critiqued the reviews as a “hasty attempt to pull a report together to present in New York, missing out on the opportunity of making the process a ‘culmination of truly national efforts’ to implement the agenda.”⁶⁷

54. The Secretary-General and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat remind States that the bottom-up reporting process should be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all, respect human rights and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind (2030 Agenda, para. 74 (d) and (e)). In some countries, such as Guatemala and Finland, voluntary national reviews have reinforced an inclusive whole of government and whole of society approach to implementation.⁶⁸ However, reviews are not standardized, making it difficult to compare progress among countries, and not all States report on every Goal, despite the integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals.

55. The high-level political forum is “only as good as the process that feeds it”, and thus far, it has not been an effective, independent oversight body distinct from the Economic and Social Council.⁶⁹ States should report on the Sustainable Development Goals more holistically, ensure greater stakeholder consultations during the process and expand discussions to focus on tangible progress under the Goals, taking into account the most vulnerable populations. States should support the right to food and establish mechanisms to assess planning, budgeting and the results of food and nutrition-related interventions. National observatories, like those established in Spain and some Latin American countries, may help to enhance these efforts.

56. Goal 17 envisions the engagement of international partners like the Rome-based agencies to help implement the Goals. The Committee on World Food Security’s Voluntary Guidelines and Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition provide key reference tools for effective governance concerning food, agriculture and nutrition for States, intergovernmental actors, civil societies and the private sector. Creating safe spaces for media actors, journalists and human rights defenders to investigate and report on progress under the Goals, consistent with the rights to freedom of expression and to information, will provide additional oversight and help to hold States accountable for inaction. Promoting transparency in the Sustainable Development Goals process and facilitating dialogue between all relevant stakeholders will further ensure that States are upholding their duties under human rights law and working towards achieving the Goals.

⁶⁷ Moizza Binat Sarwar and Susan Nicolai, “What do analyses of voluntary national reviews for Sustainable Development Goals tell us about ‘leave no one behind’?”, briefing note (London, Overseas Development Institute, 2018), p. 6.

⁶⁸ Karina Cázarez-Grageda, “The whole of Government approach: initial lessons concerning national coordinating structures for the 2030 Agenda and how review can improve their operation” and “The whole of society approach: levels of engagement and meaningful participation of different stakeholders in the review process of the 2030 Agenda”, discussion papers (Partners for Review, March 2019 and October 2018), available at <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/p4r-examines-whole-of-government-whole-of-society-approaches-in-2030-agenda-reviews/>.

⁶⁹ International Institute for Sustainable Development, “Overseeing Agenda 2030: how to avoid a repeat of the Commission on Sustainable Development”, available at www.iisd.org/library/how-avoid-repeat-commission-sustainable-development.

C. Allocating additional financial resources

57. Progress under the 2030 Agenda has largely stalled as a result of insufficient funding. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) determined that delivering on the Goals will require additional spending in 2030 of \$0.5 trillion for low-income developing countries and \$2.1 trillion for emerging market economies.⁷⁰ The Inter-Agency Task Force on Financing for Development confirms that mobilizing sufficient financing remains a major challenge to implementation, and notes that investments that are critical to achieving the Goals remain underfunded.⁷¹

58. Not all methods of financing and investment are equally compatible with a holistic and human rights-based approach to implementation. Effective financing for the Goals will take into consideration their interconnected nature and the need for bottom-up empowerment and involvement. States should carefully scrutinize sustainable projects that appeal to investors and Governments, including industrialized monoculture, large-scale dams, infrastructure for long-distance trading and export, or green cities that host migrating populations. Conducting a thorough ex ante human rights assessment of proposed projects funded through blended finance, multi-stakeholder partnerships and private investments, should ensure their compatibility with human rights. The same is true for debt-based instruments like green bonds and Sustainable Development Goal bonds, which increase the level of indebtedness of countries and the risk of default.

59. Donor countries should allocate greater financial resources for the Goals consistent with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which obligates States to allocate the maximum available resources to progressively realize human rights. Just 8 out of 25 donor countries of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development accounted for 78 per cent of aid allocated to “human rights” and 71 per cent allocated to “participation and civil society,” indicating poor support for a human rights-based approach to the Goals.⁷² Few countries are currently complying with the 0.7 per cent target for international aid spending and the 2015 pledge of \$100 billion to the Green Climate Fund, in accordance with Goal 13.

60. States should recommit to the 2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, which provides a global framework for financing sustainable development and strengthening collective action, and which has already catalysed several sustainable development projects relevant to the right to food, including the Livelihoods Mount Elgon project, which aims to empower 30,000 smallholder farmers in Kenya through an innovative investment model.⁷³

61. Investments in clean water and energy, access to land, gender equality, education, food security and the other pillars of the Goals may present opportunities to generate profit, but they also concern fundamental human rights. It is important that the right to food not be transformed into a commodity, that accessibility be provided on the basis of need and not on the basis of the financial return and that the

⁷⁰ Victor Gaspar and others, “Fiscal policy and development: human, social, and physical investment for the SDGs”, IMF Staff Discussion Note, SDN/19/03 (IMF, January 2019).

⁷¹ *Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2019* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.I.7), p. xvii.

⁷² Brian Tomlinson, AidWatch Canada, “Implementing a human rights-based approach: lessons from the experience of providers of international assistance” in *Policy Research on the Implementation of a Human Rights-Based Approach in Development Partnerships* (Quezon City, Philippines, CSO Partnerships for Development Effectiveness, January 2018), p. 26.

⁷³ Government Offices of Sweden, “Implementing the Addis Ababa Action Agenda to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a selection of innovative examples”, p. 18.

extraction of profit from agriculture and food systems should not increase the inequality gap between suppliers and rights-holders.⁷⁴

D. Reconciling fragmented and competing targets

62. Fragmentation, duplication and contradictions among the goals have stalled their implementation, but States should develop policies that highlight the synergies, or positive linkages, between Goals, rather than the perceived trade-offs.⁷⁵ Targets associated with achieving zero hunger are linked to eradicating extreme poverty and progress under other economic and social goals.⁷⁶ Goals relating to poverty and health, which are inextricably linked to the right to food and nutrition, are among those most commonly associated with progress under other goals.⁷⁷ The relative importance of these linkages and whether they amount to synergies or trade-offs can vary by region or socioeconomic context. However, States should adopt policies that balance all three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.

63. The 2030 Agenda does not advise States which of the Sustainable Development Goals to address first, but States have generally implemented goals according to the traditional non-sustainability development paradigm, that is, prioritizing goals that concern economic development to improve well-being but ignoring environmental sustainability.⁷⁸ The most common trade-offs among the Sustainable Development Goals involve Goals 3, 12 and 15, suggesting that countries will either invest in better health care or environmental protections and responsible consumption and production, but not all three.⁷⁹ Other trade-offs include converting agricultural land to biofuel production, thus expanding energy access (Goal 7) but undermining food production targets under Goal 2.

64. The inclusion of environmental goals among the final Sustainable Development Goals allows the fallible assumption that environmental sustainability is less important than, or separate from, economic and social development. Goal 2 promotes a production-oriented approach to food systems and nutrition, but guaranteeing adequate quality and quantity as part of the right to food requires looking beyond productivism and recognizing positive links to land and ocean ecosystem health (Goals 14 and 15). A functioning natural environment is a necessary prerequisite to economic and social goals and to the right to food. Goal 13, on climate change action, in particular, is a keystone goal, as realizing the right to food depends on shifting food systems away from industrialized agriculture, which has detrimental impacts on environmental and human health and is a main driver of climate change (see [A/70/287](#)).

E. Building capacity of data collection and reporting mechanisms

65. To align national development plans and Sustainable Development Goal policies with human rights obligations, States need to collect, measure and organize relevant

⁷⁴ Tomaso Ferrando, “COP24: ten years on from Lehman Brothers, we can’t trust finance with the planet”, *The Conversation*, 3 December 2018.

⁷⁵ Report of the expert group meeting on advancing the 2030 Agenda: interlinkages and common themes at the HLPF 2018, January 2018, p. 9.

⁷⁶ Brijesh Mainali and others, ‘Evaluating synergies and trade-offs among Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): explorative analyses of development paths in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa’, *Sustainability*, vol. 10, No. 3, March 2018.

⁷⁷ Prajal Pradhan and others, “A systematic study of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) interactions”, *Earth’s Future*, vol. 5, p. 1174.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1175 and 1177.

data, especially on those populations often left behind. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, the Sustainable Development Goals require the use of statistical performance indicators to detect global progress, and evidence-based decision-making to ensure policy coherence. The global indicator framework, a product of the Statistical Commission's Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, contains 232 unique indicators that serve as a yardstick for measuring progress and communicating the results to various stakeholders (see General Assembly resolution [71/313](#)). Without sufficient data, however, the indicators are meaningless. States should also take advantage of ongoing consultations with the Expert Group to advocate for appropriate modifications to the global indicator framework.

66. The Statistical Commission has stipulated that indicators for all goals should be disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location. Collecting disaggregated data is essential to a human rights-based approach and for identifying and understanding inequality between population groups. Disaggregated gender analysis has proven to be vital in times of conflict and emergency, when women are more vulnerable to hunger, malnutrition and gender-based violence.⁸⁰ The General Assembly has further reiterated the role of States in collecting fully disaggregated data consistent with human rights instruments (see resolution [68/261](#)). Effective measurement must involve genuine consultation with stakeholders, as statistical invisibility may result in further marginalization and neglect ([A/HRC/31/54](#), para. 73).

67. Unfortunately, few States have sufficient resources and capacity to collect enough disaggregated data to populate the framework's indicators. As of May 2018, less than half of the selected indicators could be populated because of a shortage of accurate and timely data.⁸¹ States should rely on external data collection, including the universal periodic review and the recent "Data to end hunger: 50 x 2030" initiative from FAO, IFAD, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to collect improved data and fill information gaps about the most marginalized, isolated and overlooked populations.

F. Promoting balanced private-sector engagement

68. The 2030 Agenda envisions broad engagement among stakeholders, but States must ensure that private sector, and particularly industry, involvement is balanced and adequately regulated. Corporate consolidation, the expansion of intellectual property regimes and the extraterritorial impunity afforded to corporate supply chain actors remain significant barriers to the enjoyment of the right to food. The lack of accountability imposed on corporate actors for human and labour rights violations in supply chains, especially transnational corporations operating outside the affiliated State's jurisdiction, undermines the greater success of the Sustainable Development Goals and justiciability of human rights (see [A/HRC/28/65](#) and [A/73/164](#)).

69. The Sustainable Development Goal framework does not address the potential for undue influence or include measures to prevent corporate influence from compromising the integrity of collaboration. Instead, Goal 17 promotes public-private partnerships, among other forms of multi-stakeholder engagement, which may reinforce existing power asymmetries, exacerbate conflicts between public and private interests and otherwise seek to leverage financial resources as a means to

⁸⁰ Food Security Information Network, *Global Report on Food Crises 2019: Joint Analysis for Better Decisions*, p. 23.

⁸¹ Steve MacFeely and Bojan Nastav, "You say you want a [data] revolution: a proposal to use unofficial statistics for the SDG global indicator framework", Global Policy Watch.

unduly influence public decision-making or policies.⁸² These partnerships are unlikely to transform corporate practices, as corporations will only engage with multi-stakeholder platforms and partnerships that advance or align with business strategies.⁸³

70. Multi-stakeholder partnerships often lack transparency and are subject to unaccountable international adjudication. They may also contribute to increased inequality both within and between countries, as 56 per cent of partnerships listed have no State partner from the developing world.⁸⁴ There is minimal participation by marginalized groups: a 2006 survey of registered United Nations partnerships revealed that less than 1 per cent had a partner from farmers, workers and trade unions, indigenous peoples, women, youth or children.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, States are turning to such partnerships to finance mega infrastructure projects with potentially devastating impacts on natural habitats and local communities, and may weaken social and environmental legislation to attract investors.

71. States cannot place civil society on the same footing as State and market actors, or ignore the concentrated power and conflicts of interest embedded in the private sector. Promoting a more balanced, inclusive and participatory governance space must start with States asserting greater regulatory authority over industry to ensure that human rights, environmental protections and labour standards are respected and protected according to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.⁸⁶ It also requires guaranteeing access to justice, especially for those who are often left behind. The review of Goal 16 at the high-level political forum in July 2019 will reveal progress in promoting this access, and the remaining challenges.

V. Conclusion and recommendations

72. The present report adopts the position that the 2030 Agenda, and specifically the Sustainable Development Goals, have the potential to transform global food systems and significantly advance the right to food, as well as other economic, social and cultural rights. Facing rising hunger and malnutrition, States must demonstrate the political will to implement the Goals holistically, and from a human rights-based approach, placing inequality and those who have been left behind at the centre of the policy process. Committing to a global agenda for change will further require States to prioritize the interests of the world over those of a single nation, to trade in market-driven policies for human-centric solutions and to allocate sufficient resources to support implementation of the Goals.

73. Embedded in the present report are recommendations to the international community and States for improving the efficacy of the Sustainable Development Goals from a right to food perspective. Good practices are framed as system-

⁸² Committee on World Food Security, High-level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, “Multi-stakeholder partnerships to finance and improve food security and nutrition in the framework of the 2030 Agenda” (Rome, June 2018), p. 41.

⁸³ Nora McKeon, “Are equity and sustainability a likely outcome when foxes and chickens share the same coop? Critiquing the concept of multi-stakeholder governance of food security”, *Globalizations*, vol. 14, No. 3 (2017), p. 384.

⁸⁴ Susan Bragdon and Carly Hayes, “Reconceiving public-private partnerships to eradicate hunger: recognizing small-scale farmers and agricultural biological diversity as the foundation of global food security”, *Georgetown Journal of International Law* (2018).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Working Group on Business and Human Rights, “The business and human rights dimension of sustainable development: embedding ‘protect, respect and remedy’ in SDGs implementation” (29 June 2017).

wide solutions rather than ad hoc, incremental remedies. The non-exhaustive list of recommendations below will help to build global food systems that are more inclusive, nutrition-driven and sustainable, and which reinforce human rights. Successful reforms under the Goals are about breaking through silos, guaranteeing measurable commitments and promoting cooperation with all relevant stakeholders.

74. Owing to restrictions on the word count, the report does not discuss the external drivers of hunger and malnutrition that aggravate inequality and undermine the right to food. For example, conflict, climate change and an international economic regime that supports the commodification and industrialization of agriculture over human rights. Realizing the right to food and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals requires immediate action to address these drivers.

75. With the view that achieving the right to food will benefit from successful implementation of the Goals and the 2030 Agenda, the Special Rapporteur recommends that international organizations:

(a) Including the Rome-based agencies, FAO, the World Food Programme, IFAD and the Committee on World Food Security, partner with State and municipal governments to enhance implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including through the collection and analysis of disaggregated data on the populations experiencing the highest rates of inequality, hunger and malnutrition, and the facilitation of greater engagement between governments and civil society on policy development for the Goals;

(b) Geneva-based human rights mechanisms, for example, the Human Rights Council, the special procedures, the treaty bodies and the universal periodic review, should be more actively integrated in the Sustainable Development Goal implementation process, coordinating with States and the high-level political forum to provide additional support and resources for data collection and monitoring, accountability, oversight and the application of a human rights-based approach.

76. States should:

(a) Recognize that the Sustainable Development Goals and economic, social and cultural rights are mutually reinforcing, and adopt a human rights-based approach to implementation of the Goals, ratify all human rights instruments and align national laws and policies with human rights principles of equality, non-discrimination, participation, universality, indivisibility, accountability and the rule of law;

(b) Systematically integrate human rights mechanisms in national Sustainable Development Goal planning and localization, and ensure more coordinated, cohesive action between New York and Geneva;

(c) Adopt a comprehensive view of inequality that focuses on the root causes of exclusion, implement macroeconomic measures that are conducive to equitable, inclusive and sustainable growth, measure the full distributive effects of fiscal policies on all wealth brackets and redistribute wealth through progressive fiscal policies;

(d) Expand social protections and investments in public services consistent with ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) and avoid neo-liberal austerity measures and other economic policies that dismantle existing social safety nets;

(e) **Adopt strategic policy interventions that empower and engage women who have been structurally left behind by mainstreaming gender equality into economic policies such as gender-sensitive budgeting, removing barriers to access to food and productive resources and fairly compensating women for unpaid and informal work in accordance with general recommendation No. 34 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the rights of rural women;**

(f) **Regulate the involvement of children in the agricultural sector consistent with ILO minimum age requirements and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, protect children's right to education and prohibit advertisements for unhealthy goods targeted at children and young adults;**

(g) **Invest in rural development and revitalization by strengthening rural-urban integration, increasing access to markets for smallholder farmers and funding rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services;**

(h) **Protect the rights of peasants and rural communities to land and reproductive resources, including customary rights, in accordance with the recently adopted United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas;**

(i) **Afford greater attention to indigenous peoples in the Sustainable Development Goal process, engaging and consulting with indigenous peoples on sustainable development and climate change-mitigation strategies, in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and guarantee decent work and education, especially for indigenous women and girls;**

(j) **Re-evaluate and challenge the vested interests, incentives and power relations embedded in industrial agrochemical-dependent food systems, and create a safe, inclusive and poverty-free environment for smallholder producers through greater investments in agroecology;**

(k) **Reject xenophobic, divisive and false rhetoric towards migrants, including refugees and internally displaced persons, and extend all human rights protections to non-citizens, in accordance with international human rights law;**

(l) **Protect migrants, as rights holders, from discrimination at all stages of the migratory process and provide them with unrestricted access to justice, particularly regarding their right to food;**

(m) **Introduce short- and long-term strategies to ensure that migrant populations can feed themselves in a dignified manner and have access to decent work opportunities and social protection schemes;**

(n) **Actively participate in the Sustainable Development Goal follow-up and review process, cooperating with all stakeholders and presenting a voluntary national review to the high-level political forum annually that reports progress on every Goal;**

(o) **Build the capacity of national level authorities to provide adequate oversight, accountability and, most importantly, mechanisms for redress, and coordinate with non-governmental actors to assist in monitoring;**

(p) **Conduct ex ante human rights assessments of proposed sustainable development projects funded through blended finance and ensure that projects actually advance the right to food and are not just seen as profit-generating opportunities;**

(q) **Allocate greater financial resources to the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those relevant to the right to food, and recommit to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and other multilateral agreements on funding;**

(r) **Conduct a systematic, data-driven analysis of linkages within the Sustainable Development Goal framework to strategically prioritize goals, while maximizing synergies and avoiding detrimental trade-offs. Goals related to climate change and environmental protection should be prioritized in conjunction with economic and social goals;**

(s) **Appoint chief data officers and build the capacity of national statistical offices to collect disaggregated data, especially on populations that experience heightened inequality, and engage with non-state actors that have the capacity to support data collection efforts;**

(t) **Regulate the involvement of private corporate actors in the Sustainable Development Goal implementation process, ensuring that groups experiencing heightened inequality, including women, children, indigenous peoples, peasants and migrants, are able to participate in governance and decision-making processes;**

(u) **Establish suitable safeguards to prevent negative corporate influences on nutrition governance, and hold companies accountable for manipulation and misinformation, as part of a human rights-based approach to the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–2025);**

(v) **Address threats of climate change, conflict and economic policies to the right to food and global food systems, following the recommendations included in reports of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food contained in documents [A/HRC/37/61](#), [A/72/188](#) and [A/70/287](#).**
