

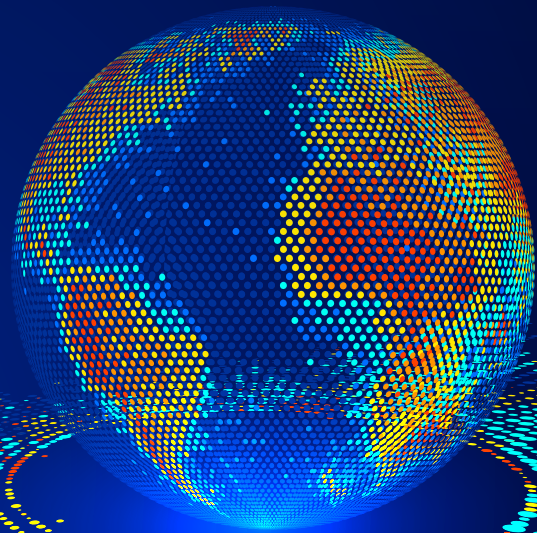
HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Ministerial Luncheon hosted jointly
by the President of ECOSOC and
the Regional Commissions

Translating the 2030 Agenda into national
sustainable development realities

Regional perspectives

Delegates' Dining Room (4th floor)
United Nations Headquarters, New York
17 July 2019, 1.15–2.45 p.m.



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Background note

In 2019, the high-level political forum on sustainable development, convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) from 9 to 18 July, finalizes the first cycle of thematic reviews with an in-depth analysis of Sustainable Development Goals 4, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17. Member States, the United Nations system and stakeholders are gathering in New York to take stock of progress made, identify areas where efforts are falling short and generate momentum towards the historic SDG Summit in September in the framework of the United Nations General Assembly.

Four years into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, all regions have embraced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with countries around the globe adopting national strategies and plans and adapting their institutional settings to the requirements of this new development paradigm. Although there are encouraging signs of action, data show that progress towards achieving the SDGs is still slow and uneven, both within and between regions.

The regional commissions play a critical role in supporting Member States in their efforts to respond to the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda, by providing analytical work, capacity, and dedicated platforms for sectoral and intersectoral dialogue among multiple stakeholders. Chief among these are the regional forums for sustainable development,¹ which have now become consolidated as the regional platforms for cooperation and peer learning on the follow-up and implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The data and progress assessments emerging from the regional forums can provide a significant measure of global progress and help set the stage for the SDG Summit to be held in September 2019, as well as identify policy responses capable of making a tangible difference in diverse country and regional settings.

Asia and the Pacific

Some progress made but acceleration needed to achieve the SDGs

- At the current rate of progress, no SDG will be met in Asia and the Pacific by 2030. The Asia-Pacific region needs to accelerate progress on every Goal and in some cases reverse current trends if it is to achieve the 2030 development agenda.
- Since 2000, Asia and the Pacific has made the greatest progress on Goals 4 (quality education) and 7 (affordable and clean energy), but even there, almost every measurable target requires intensified efforts. At the minimum, the region must reverse trends in areas such as pre-primary education and renewable energy.



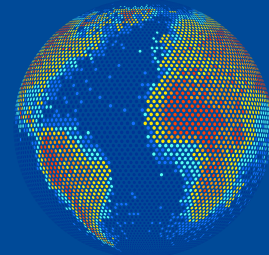
Regression and stagnation

- Despite great efforts, progress is insufficient on Goals 1 (no poverty), 3 (good health and well-being), 5 (gender equality), and 17 (partnerships for the goals).
- Regrettably, the region has regressed on three Goals: clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), responsible consumption and production (Goal 12), and climate action (Goal 13).

Environmental declines widespread

- Notably, 30% of indicators that require intensified improvements or a rectification of course to meet the 2030 targets are environmental. Ten of the 11 indicators that have worsened the most since 2000 are environmental, with greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from agriculture and hazardous waste generation taking the top two spots for the most-needed turnaround.
- Environment-related targets are also among the hardest to measure, owing to lack of data: 24% of the targets lacking evidence are environmental.

¹ The Forum of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development; the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development; Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development; the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region; the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development.



The data gap is critical

- While lack of data remains the biggest challenge for assessing progress towards the SDGs, in 2018, 50% more SDG indicators became available compared to 2017. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) used 85 SDG indicators to analyse SDG progress in that region and five subregions in 2018. Where data were lacking, another 26 indicators were used from internationally recognized sources to complement the SDG indicators and provide more robust analysis.

For further information, see:

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific/Asian Development Bank/United Nations Development Programme (UNESCAP/ADB/UNDP), *Accelerating progress: An empowered, inclusive and equal Asia and the Pacific*, Bangkok, March 2019 [online] <https://www.unescap.org/publications/accelerating-progress-empowered-inclusive-and-equal-asia-and-pacific>.

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2019*, Bangkok, May 2019 [online] <https://www.unescap.org/publications/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2019>.

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), *Report of the Sixth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development* (ESCAP/RFSD/2019/3), Bangkok, April 2019 [online] https://www.unescap.org/apfsd/6/document/APFSD6_3E.pdf.

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), *Committing to strengthening the links between national, regional and global follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific* (ESCAP/RES/75/2), June 2019 [online] https://www.unescap.org/commission/75/document/E75_Res2E.pdf.



Latin America and the Caribbean

The Latin American and Caribbean region has already achieved or is well on track to fulfil some of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, but it cannot realistically meet others under the current development paradigm. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) carried out a simulation exercise to monitor progress on 20 indicators of the global SDG indicator framework since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. The outcomes of this exercise show very uneven dynamics among the indicators, as reflected in the following results:²

- The region has **reached target levels for two indicators** (SDG indicator 3.2.1 on child mortality and indicator 14.5.1 on coverage of protected marine areas). The region is **on the right track for three indicators** (SDG indicator 9.5.1 on research and development expenditure, indicator 10.1.1 on income per capita growth among the bottom 40% of the population, and indicator 17.8.1 on proportion of individuals using the Internet);_this represents_an increase for SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) and SDG 17 (partnerships for the Goals) and a decrease for SDG 10 (reduced inequalities).

² It is worth noting that there are great differences among countries, albeit this exercise is focused on regional results.



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- For nine of the indicators observed, **the target will not be reached by 2030 if the current trend continues**. These are SDG indicator 4.1.1 on primary and secondary education; indicator 5.5.1 on proportion of seats held by women in parliaments and local governments; indicator 6.1.1 on the use of safely managed drinking water services and indicator 6.2.1 on the use of safely managed sanitation services; indicator 7.2.1 on the renewable energy share in energy consumption; indicator 12.2.2 on domestic material consumption; the reduction of greenhouse emissions as provided in the Paris Agreement; indicator 15.1.1 on forest area as a proportion of total land area; and indicator 17.11.1 on developing and least developed countries' share of global exports.
- For two indicators (SDG indicator 2.1.1 on prevalence of stunting among children under age 5 and indicator 8.5.2 on the unemployment rate disaggregated by sex, age and persons with disabilities), the continuation of the 2000–2015 trends would have produced a reduction in stunting and unemployment, although not their complete elimination. However, more recent trends (stagnation in stunting reduction between 2010 and 2015 and increase in unemployment in 2015–2017) **indicate that the targets are not on track to be met**.
- Lastly, the results for two indicators (SDG indicators 1.1.1 on the population below the international poverty line and 1.2.1 on population living below the national poverty line) indicate that extreme poverty could be reduced to 3% if a very high per capita growth rate (5%) were sustained. Poverty cannot be reduced by half with a growth rate of 3%. In either case, however, the targets would be met with a **change in income distribution** reducing the Gini coefficient by 0.5% each year.

For further information, see:

United Nations, *Quadrennial report on regional progress and challenges in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean* (LC/FDS.3/3/Rev.1), Santiago, 2019 [online] <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/44552-quadrennial-report-regional-progress-and-challenges-relation-2030-agenda>.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), "Intergovernmentally agreed conclusions and recommendations of the third meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development" (LC/FDS.3/4), April 2019 [online] <https://foroalc2030.cepal.org/2019/en/documents/intergovernmentally-agreed-conclusions-and-recommendations-third-meeting-forum-countries>.

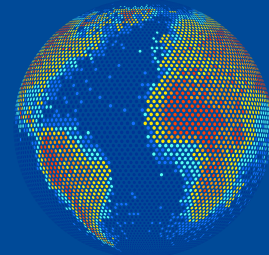
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), "Summary of the Chair", Third meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, Santiago, 24-26 April 2019 [online] <https://foroalc2030.cepal.org/2019/en/documents/summary-chair-third-meeting-forum-countries-latin-america-and-caribbean-sustainable>.



Europe

In the region covered by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), progress towards the SDGs has been mixed across Goals and subregions. The persistence of gender disparities continues to prevent a faster pace of improvement across multiple Goals. A common trend across the region is increasing inequality (counter to SDG 10), thus betraying the ambition of leaving no one behind. In some cases, the increase in inequality has been accompanied by stagnating or falling incomes. While unemployment (SDG indicator 8.5.2) has fallen across the region, it remains very high in some countries. Despite some progress, the proportion of young people not in education or employment (SDG indicator 8.6.1) remains

high. Economic growth has recovered somewhat but productivity growth (target 8.2), which is critical for sustained prosperity, remains sluggish.



Improved infrastructure (SDG 9) is required to address multiple SDGs, including those related to economic growth and environmental sustainability. Much work remains to be done in this direction. In the European Union, the share of rail and inland waterways in freight transport has declined. In many countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and, in particular, the Western Balkans, significant improvements have been made in infrastructure in recent years but, overall, current levels of infrastructure development are low.

Moving in the right direction does not yet imply that the underlying situation is positive. Despite advances, meeting environment-related Goals still remains out of reach for many countries. Progress in decoupling economic expansion from environmental degradation (SDG target 8.4) is still insufficient. Domestic material consumption per capita has declined in parts of the region where it was higher, supported by a growing service sector. However, the overall material footprint per capita remains relatively high. The threats to biodiversity (SDG 15) remain an important concern, in particular in high-income countries in the region.

Continued advances have been observed on climate action (SDG 13), amid generalized increases in energy efficiency (SDG target 7.3). Although the share of renewables has displayed a positive trend (SDG target 7.2), there are large differences across the region. Overall, none of the UNECE countries has taken sufficient action yet to combat climate change and, in some cases, the gap is critically large.

While the region has good education (SDG 4) indicators overall, the commitment to leave no one behind is not fully honoured, thus contributing to the reproduction of inequalities (SDG indicator 4.5.1). Some countries are slipping back on certain measures of performance and progress in securing adult participation in learning is limited.

Arab States

Despite notable efforts to move forward with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region, structural challenges such as oil-dependent and rentier economies (affecting SDGs 8, 9 and 12), poor economic growth, unemployment, inequalities and exclusion continue to hamper sustainable development achievements. A series of conflicts over the past few years have added pressures and caused regression across the region in areas like hunger, stunting and malnutrition (affecting SDG 2). This is in addition to occupation that continues to violate the rights of the Palestinian people and risks leaving them behind entirely. Progress on all SDGs is slow, and the region will not achieve the Goals by 2030, with some critical areas in need of targeted action. Strengthening institutional governance, enhancing evidence-based policymaking,

promoting stronger accountability frameworks and giving greater political voice to citizens and would go a long way towards helping to bring about positive and cumulative progress on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Poverty, particularly multidimensional poverty, remains a serious challenge and inequality is on the rise in the region (SDGs 1 and 10). The region is far from achieving the targets of SDG 1. National poverty measures mask significant disparities across the region and within countries, and extreme poverty in Arab least developed States remains quite high. Across the region, more effort is needed to ensure better and more inclusive social protection systems and measures where the region is far from achieving SDG target 1.3. Youth unemployment is high in the region and highest among young women, at 40% on average (SDG 8).

Gender inequality continues to constrain social and economic potential and limits the rights of women and girls (SDG 5). The region is far from achieving targets related to SDG 5 and has the world's lowest rate of economic participation by women, at 25%, compared to a global average of 50%. The proportion of women in Arab parliaments is on the rise, at 19% in 2018; however, the average remains relatively low. High rates of gender-based violence and a rise in child marriage as a result of increasing conflict are also deep challenges and impact progress on other SDGs. A





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whole-of-society approach to achieving SDG 5 is particularly necessary in the region to ensure that changes in gender dynamics and in the situation of women and girls are transformative in line with the 2030 Agenda.

Data and progress are particularly weak on some environment-related SDGs (12, 13, 14 and 15). While some countries in the region have achieved marked success in using solar power, wastewater treatment and other initiatives, and many have submitted nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and adopted disaster-risk-reduction strategies, the region is far from achieving key SDG targets to ensure environmental sustainability. The current long-term trend is of a falling share of renewable energy in final energy consumption (SDG 7). Climate change is exacerbating the existing challenge of water scarcity (SDG 6), with implications for food production, especially for the rural poor (SDGs 1 and 2). And almost 98% of the population in the Arab region is considered exposed to airborne particulate matter levels higher than the limit recommended under World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines (SDGs 3 and 11).

The data gap is not only a technical problem; it can aggravate inequality (all SDGs). While governments are working hard to address the data gap and provide more and better data, achieving the SDGs and ensuring no one is left behind demands good-quality disaggregated data. Very little gender-disaggregated data are available in the region beyond those related to health and education (SDGs 3 and 4). However, even less or almost no disaggregation is available by other categories such as ethnicity, age, disability, migratory status or geographical location. This is limiting efforts to address the needs of different groups and to assess the impact of efforts to achieve the SDGs.

For further information, see:

United Nations, *Report of the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (E/HLPF/2019/3/Add.3)*, April 2019 [online] <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/u524/arab-forum-sustainable-development-2019-final-report-en.pdf>.

See Arabic version [online] <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/u524/arab-forum-sustainable-development-2019-final-report-ar.pdf>.



Africa

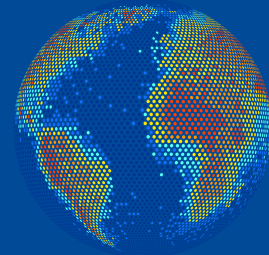
African countries have the unique and dual obligation of concurrently implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs and the goals of Agenda 2063. The Africa We Want, of the African Union. The African Union-United Nations framework³ provides essential tools to achieve integrated implementation, follow-up and reporting on the two Agendas.

*Significant implementation progress has been made by the region, four years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and midway into the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063.*⁴

Primary school completion has broadly improved in some African countries. Nonetheless, two thirds of the countries in Africa have yet to reach the target of full completion of primary education. Many countries have developed national employment legislation and policies to support the creation of employment opportunities and mainstream employment creation objectives into macroeconomic and development policies. The challenge is to contend with the rising number of young people not in education, employment or training, which is expected to increase by more than 7 million, from 53 million in 2018 to 60.7 million in 2023. All African countries have signed the

³ See United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), *AU – UN Framework on Implementation of Agenda 2063 And Agenda 2030*, Addis Ababa [online] https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/au-un-implementation-framework-for-a2063-and-a2030_web_en.pdf.

⁴ See [online] https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-11_an_overview_of_agenda.pdf.



Paris Agreement and 48 of them have already ratified it and set ambitious nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to climate action. Countries will need approximately US\$ 3 trillion to finance these NDCs. Moreover, African countries have adopted the Agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area and need to ratify and implement this Agreement to capitalize on the enormous opportunities that the Continental Free Trade Area offers for revenue mobilization and promoting inclusive growth, including the empowerment of marginalized and vulnerable groups. Finally, overall, governance in Africa remains on an upward trajectory. Improvements are being made regarding the rule of law, participation, rights, and transparency and accountability.

In spite of progress made, the current view is that the Goals are unlikely to be achieved in Africa by 2030 at the prevailing pace and scale of implementation. The region is confronted by substantial challenges that severely impede progress. The growth levels for African countries, averaging 3.2% in 2018, are below those needed to achieve the SDGs. To get on track to meet the Goals, Africa needs to triple its 2018 gross domestic product (GDP) per capita growth of 0.6%, which is too low to significantly mitigate the high levels of poverty and inequality. Even though the proportion of Africans living in extreme poverty declined from 57% in 1990 to 43% in 2012, within the same period, the total number living in poverty in Africa increased from 287.6 million to 388.8 million. To achieve the SDGs, Africa needs to meet incremental financing needs estimated at between US\$ 614 billion and US\$ 638 billion per year. Countries of the region need strategies to sustainably manage debt stocks and associated debt servicing costs, which are rising pose serious challenges in the effort to increase the mobilization of financial resources. Recently, there has been an upsurge in public and foreign debt levels, which rose to approximately 50% and 27%, respectively, in 2018, from 48.4% and 26.5% in 2017. The continent's total debt-to-GDP ratio rose from about 35.5% to 37.6% between those two years.

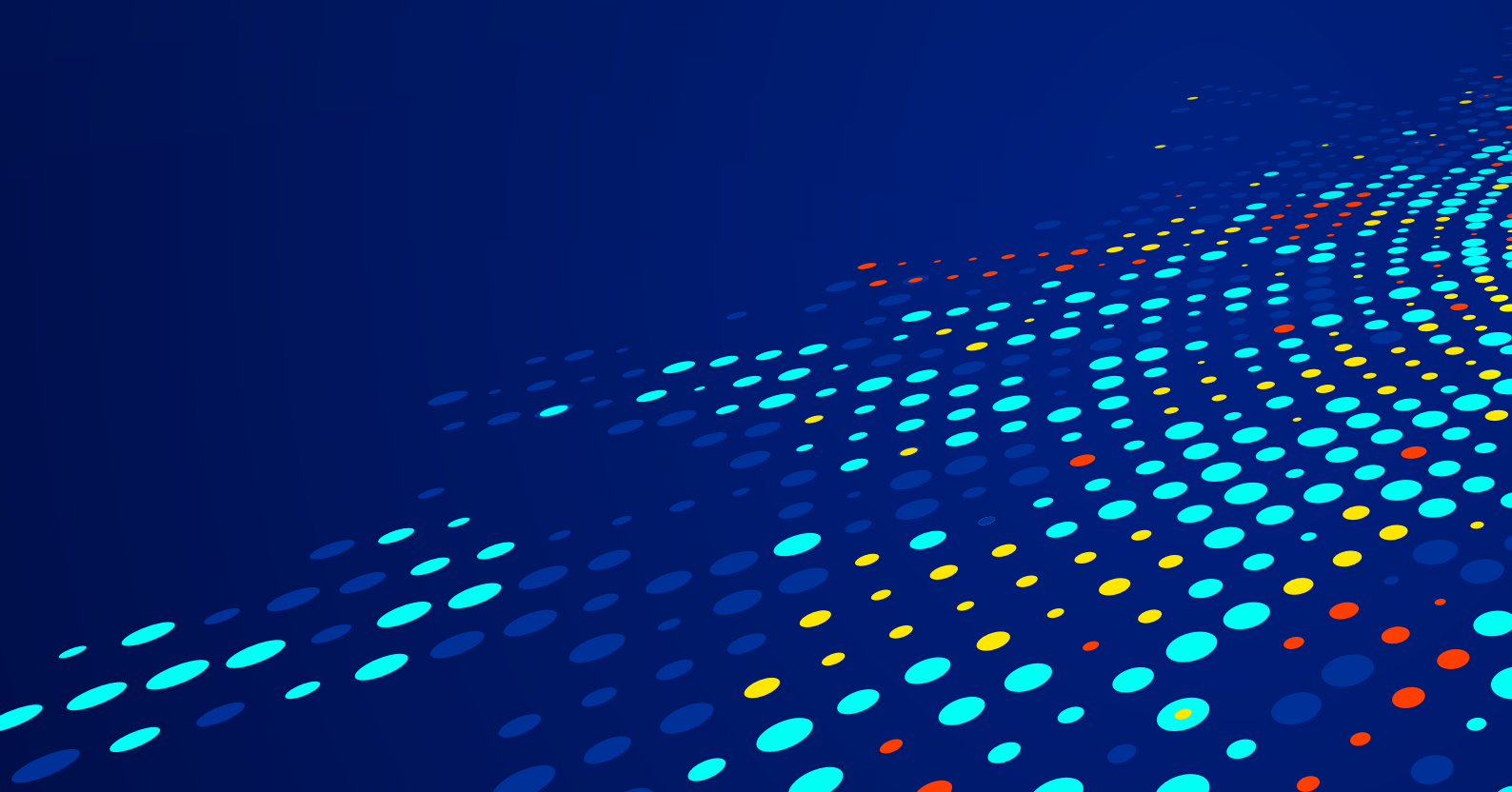
There is a severe lack of data for tracking and evidence-based design and implementation of the goals of the two Agendas, which at the same time face common challenges that impede the harnessing of science, technology and innovation for sustainable development. Many African countries lack science, technology and innovation policies, plans and strategies. Where they exist, the frameworks are poorly funded, implemented and monitored. African countries should therefore develop, strengthen, implement, monitor and evaluate their science, technology and innovation frameworks.



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