



United Nations General Assembly
High-level thematic debate on debt sustainability and socio-economic equality for all

Monday, 15 April 2024
General Assembly Hall, UN Headquarters

SUMMARY

As part of the first-ever United Nations General Assembly Sustainability Week, the President of the General Assembly for the seventy-eighth session, H.E. Mr. Dennis Francis, convened the high-level thematic debate on debt sustainability and socio-economic equality for all to provide an opportunity for Member States and stakeholders to focus on challenges to achieving debt sustainability and the implications for the most vulnerable, in particular in developing countries.

Opening segment

The President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Dennis Francis, opened the thematic debate by encouraging urgent solutions to high rates of indebtedness, particularly in developing countries, which has been locking these countries in an interminable cycle of poverty and under-development with limited prospects for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The President further emphasized that the well-being and welfare of the people are often sacrificed in order to meet onerous debt obligations, with the poorest and most vulnerable being hit the hardest. Citing the example of countries in Africa and other developing regions of the world, the President noted that the interest payments on debt were astronomical, often exceeding the Government's combined expenditure on health and education.

The Secretary General of the United Nations, H.E. Mr. António Guterres, underscored the prolonged challenge of the global debt crisis and the imperative to find a sustainable solution in order to reduce disparities within and among states. It was highlighted that debt servicing in many countries, mostly developing countries – home to 40% of humanity, was so high that these nations very often could not afford to invest in their own nation and people, in the areas of health and education. The Secretary General stated that two actions need to be taken immediately: bringing the SDG Stimulus to life and reforming the international financial architecture, which should ensure fair representation of developing countries.

The message that the poorest and the most vulnerable people are the ones who are bearing the greatest burden was echoed by the President of the Economic and Social Council, H.E. Ms. Paula Narváez. She also highlighted that the 2024 Financing for Development Report states that financing development holds the key to changing things. She indicated that the debt crisis is taking place in a global economy that is at the end of its slowest 5-year growth period since the early 1990s, making it harder for vulnerable countries to get themselves out of the crisis. She expressed hope that concrete solutions will be adopted during the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4), which will take place in 2025.

United Nations Development Programme Administrator, Mr. Achim Steiner mentioned that due to developments taking place in the world, such as a weakened economy, inflation and high interest rates that it was no longer sustainable for many countries to comply with their debt obligations. He cited 2024 Human Development Report which highlighted that developing countries are not recovering post-pandemic and continue to be negatively affected by the unsustainable debt levels. As part of the solutions, a paradigm shift should take place in financing for development.

In the scene-setting remarks, Prime Minister and Leader of Government Business in Parliament of the Republic of Uganda, H.E. Ms. Robinah Nabbanja, stated that “broad-based social-economic transformation”, involving all sectors of the economy, is a priority for the Republic of Uganda. As she pointed out, if the economy of the world grows, so will the prosperity for everyone. She emphasized the need to get rid of commercial lending, and instead prioritize concessional and low interest financing to be used for vital sectors such as infrastructure, education and health in developing countries. Lastly, Prime Minister Nabbanja stated that “the present exploitative debts should be cancelled” to ensure a social-economic transformation for all.

Finally, Prime Minister and Minister for National Security and the Public Service, and Minister for Finance, Economic Affairs and Investment of Barbados, H.E. Ms. Mia Amor Mottley, SC, MP, in her keynote address, stressed the needs to achieve debt sustainability and socio-economic equality for all. Firstly, to recognize that there is a need for debt to be affordable, fit-for-purpose and long-term enough to contribute to sustainable inclusive growth, and gave both the United Kingdom and Germany as example who received a hundred years to repay their debts after the World Wars. Secondly, the reform of the international financial architecture is vital for the world of today. Changes to the Common Framework and ensuring the participation of vulnerable developing countries were emphasized as the most important issues.

Fireside Chat – “People Pay the Price”

During the fireside chat, the participants discussed how people are affected and mentioned possible solutions. The involvement of the private sector, specifically credit agencies, was highlighted, and a specific example provided was the role of credit agencies whose ratings work based on subjective assessments instead of mathematical or financial statistics, which translates to hundreds of billions of dollars of higher interest rates paid by developing countries. There is also a significant disparity in borrowing costs as developing countries spend twice as much on interest versus developed countries, even after taking into account their access to resources and concessional financing. The key takeaway was that these types of forums are vital to bring the various countries and stakeholders together to discuss and bring about informed changes.

Plenary segment

During the plenary segment, Member States spoke on multiple and interlinked crises that have significantly decreased the fiscal space and added to their debt burdens and restricts their capacity to invest in sustainable development. Some participants expressed that debt can be a useful tool for a country’s development, but it must be managed carefully to ensure debt sustainability.

Participants spoke on the urgent need for debt restructuring and access to long-term, affordable, and accessible financing for development. Some of the groundwork for this has already been done in the SDG Stimulus, and this will also be one of the topics of the Fourth International Conference for

Financing for Development (FfD4) that will take place next year. A debt standstill, i.e. debt payment suspensions that can be provided in time of crisis, was seen as a possible solution for many countries who are struggling with their payments.

The need for more collaboration between countries in debt in multilateral settings to ensure they have a united front when calling for changes is also imperative. Examples were provided in support of the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Tax, and initiatives such as the Bridgetown Initiative. The need for support from international organizations, developed countries and international financial institutions was stressed to address debt challenges, getting more low-cost lending, investments for development, as well as the need for solidarity and understanding from the international community.

Member States also suggested solutions to the debt crisis, such as effective debt management, debt relief and restructuring to make debt sustainable and manageable.

Finally, there was an urgent call for reform of the current international financial architecture that does not properly function and meet the needs for our current world, from enhancing debt transparency, scaling-up lending in local currencies and developing new debt instruments, to ensuring that there is more equity in representation in the global governance. Structural reforms within the international financial system are needed to address longstanding gaps and help with more and greater investments to stimulate economic growth and the sustainable development.



United Nations General Assembly High-level thematic event on tourism

Tuesday, 16 April 2024
General Assembly Hall, UN Headquarters

SUMMARY

As part of the first-ever United Nations General Assembly Sustainability Week, the President of the General Assembly for the seventy-eighth session, H.E. Mr. Dennis Francis, convened the high-level thematic event on tourism to advance a concerted approach on strengthening tourism resilience at the highest level and maximizing its contribution to sustainability. The event also provided an opportunity for Member States, Observers, UN System, civil society, and other stakeholders to discuss strategies, share best practices and experiences to promote sustainable and resilient tourism and the sector's contribution to achieving Sustainable Development Goals. This high-level thematic event was organized in cooperation with the UN Tourism, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 77/178 entitled "Promotion of sustainable and resilient tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty eradication and environmental protection", as well as resolution 77/269 entitled "Global Tourism Resilience Day".

Opening segment

The President of the General Assembly, H.E. Dennis Francis, opened the meeting by stating that tourism sector is a major catalyst for development and has an extraordinary potential to contribute not only to the global economy but also to sustainable development. In 2023, tourism accounted for 3 percent of global GDP – with an estimated direct gross domestic product of \$3.3 trillion. In addition, tourism is a driver of income and tax revenue, especially for SIDS, LLDCs, and LDCs. In SIDS alone, tourism accounts for nearly 35% of all export earnings and this can amount up to 85%. He emphasized the importance of ensuring resilience and sustainability in the tourism sector and welcomed the adoption of the Statistical Framework on Measuring Sustainability in Tourism by the UN Statistical Commission earlier this year.

The Secretary-General of UN Tourism, Mr. Zurab Pololikashvili, spoke of the challenges of tourism sector, such as external shocks like conflicts and pandemics, as well as the importance of recoveries. According to him, despite taking a great hit due to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism "has bounced back from the biggest crisis in its history". In 2023, international arrivals recovered almost 90% of pre-pandemic levels, and the income generated by the sector as an export reached USD 1.6 trillion. The need to invest in people, in particular, youth was underscored as well as the need to work on the wellbeing of people and planet. The importance of data was also highlighted, and the vital role of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST) in this regard.

Lastly, Minister of Tourism of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Chairman of the Executive Council of UN Tourism, H.E. Mr. Ahmed Al-Khateeb, emphasized the importance of tourism for the global economy. He mentioned that that tourism sector is expected to grow at an accelerated pace of 6.1% annually over the next decade, which is double the growth rate of the global economy for the same period at 2.9%. He also highlighted tourism's direct and indirect contribution to employment, citing that, currently, tourism employs nearly a tenth of the world's population, supporting more than 330 million people globally. Initiatives ensuring that tourism can contribute to sustainable development were mentioned, such as the Global Centre for Sustainable Tourism in Riyadh.

Fireside chat – “Future of Tourism”

In a candid exchange, the Fireside Chat participants discussed the importance of sustainability in the tourism industry. Finding the balance between the socio-economic, commercial and environmental aspects of the industry continues to be a challenge. Participants mentioned strategies being implemented by some countries and companies, including initiatives such as banning single use plastics, using sustainable materials and ensuring social services for the employees. Tools to help develop new strategies and policies, such as the Sustainability Toolkit by the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) and research and plans from World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), were also presented.

Decarbonization was indicated as an example of an ongoing issue where insufficient progress in sustainable solutions has been recorded. Partnerships between governments, energy sector, and airlines were mentioned by the various participants to find and adopt policies on a national and international level.

Participants also emphasized the importance of local or community-based tourism, which ensures that the society as a whole is involved and receives benefits from the tourism industry, thereby promoting socio-economic equality for all. The need to ensure the active role of local communities in the decision-making process, such as the construction of new buildings or hotel, or even regarding sustainability practices was highlighted.

Plenary segment

The challenge to balance the socio-economic, commercial and environmental aspects of tourism to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was also highlighted by Member States. The following were the main messages emanating from the statements during the plenary segment:

- Tourism is a sector that has both benefits and many challenges, which were highlighted by the Member States. There is a limited amount of financial and human capital in developing countries, particularly the Least Developed Countries (LDC), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDC) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The socio-economic inequality that tends to be exacerbated by the tourism industry was also highlighted. There are internal factors, such as domestic political instability and violence, that discourage tourists, especially in cases where a travel advisory has been provided that portrays the negative images of a destination. The COVID-19 pandemic had a crippling impact on the global tourism sector.

- Speakers highlighted the negative consequences of climate change and extreme weather phenomena, such as hurricanes, tsunamis, and earthquakes on the tourism sector while acknowledging that the industry is also actively contributing to the climate crisis through massive consumption of energy, high generation of carbon emissions, and overburdening of resources on the land and in the sea, which are creating unbearable pressures on already fragile natural ecosystems. Various Member States mentioned the need to incorporate climate strategies in the tourism plans.
- The importance of organizing high-level tourism meetings was stated by participants as it provides the opportunity for stakeholders to share strategies and best practices to improve the industry and ensure that tourism becomes more sustainable and resilient. These strategies include diversifying the source markets, including involving women and youth in tourism-related programs, and creating development plans, policies and legislation concerning tourism. There is also a need to create more synergies between tourism and other sectors such as energy, transport, and infrastructure connectivity, since they are all interlinked. Irrefutably, there is a need for a comprehensive tourism model.
- Countries also need to ensure that the population can fairly benefit from the tourism sector's economic growth. One way this can be achieved by leveraging community-based tourism to promote local cuisines, arts, and culture; thereby involving marginalized communities, while promoting that the natural resources and cultural heritage becomes part of the long-term economic plan. This can ensure the sector's sustainability and resilience.
- Participants emphasized the importance of public-private partnerships, including facilitating more dialogues for partnerships in tourism. Investment in infrastructure development to enhance accessibility and connectivity to tourism destinations was named as one of the priority areas. In addition, harnessing digital technologies and fostering innovation were pointed out as possible investment opportunities. There are countries, including LLDCs, who would need to strengthen capacities to enhance tourism promotion.

Ministerial Roundtable 1: Sustainable Tourism – The Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism

The participants in the roundtable discussed the recently adopted Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST), which aims to accelerate sustainable tourism by assessing, evaluating and monitor the impact of tourism on people, the economy, and the environment.

The SF-MST offers a standard in which realistic measures are set. It also provides real-time and disaggregated data on tourism activities accessible to Member States which can assist them in decision making and policy direction. Therefore, countries can also improve their accountability in sustainability to the industry and ultimately the people. It also facilitates the sharing of best practices on a local, national and regional level.

Various countries have conducted pilot projects and some of the results were discussed. With the SF-MST the countries can promote a balance between investment in tourism and conservations of the eco-system. Other results included: data input for tourism policies; a better management of tourism as an industry; and an improvement in community-led tourism, where the community participation is actively encouraged in decision making processes related to tourism in the respective country.

The framework also ensures that local communities and national governments are not solely focusing on the economic benefits of tourism. When making decisions, the social and environmental impact is also observed as a result of data provided in the ST-MST. One notable conclusion that was presented was the fact that well-being and hospitality are often a neglected aspect in tourism discussion.

Ministerial Roundtable 2: Resilient Tourism – Fostering resilience tourism to facilitate and ensure global sustainability

The participants in this roundtable emphasized the importance of resilient tourism in ensuring that countries can adequately recover from future crises whilst being equipped to harness tourism as a driver of sustainable development. Resilience is needed to achieve sustainability.

Initiatives to enhance resilient tourism included incorporating disaster risk management into tourism policies by launching programs such as early warning systems, rapid response, and access future mitigation with national, regional, and global partners. There is also a need to provide platforms for deliberation, study, innovation, creative and new systems to manage disruptions. To be ready and prepared for any and all disasters, there is a need for the proper trainings to take place and certification mechanism in the tourism sector to ensure its resilience in the face of crisis. At the same time, there is a need to create and maintain national public awareness on these processes and initiatives, as to best prepare the local population.

A “people centered agenda” was also highlighted in the resilient tourism discussion. Tourism is an industry that is completely focused on people providing services such as hospitality and food, and the people who are receiving these services. To ensure the continuity and growth of this industry, countries and the private sector must ensure that people are provided with fair wages, pension, and housing. In addition, opportunities for growth and innovation should also be provided to individuals in the tourism industry.

The role of women in terms of empowerment and participation was also emphasized in resilient tourism. Women hold 54% of tourism jobs compared to 39% in the broader economy. It is therefore important that women are actively involved in the processes and the decision-making aspect. It is also vital that women are occupy more senior positions in the industry and adequate social security provisions in order to protect them.

In particular, the capacity to recognize, manage, mitigate, and recover from social, economic, environmental, and political disruptions, and then to thrive afterwards and ensure resilient tourism. This is especially the case for developing countries such as SIDS. One of the serious challenges facing the countries is the funds and the capacity to implement these strategies. There was a call to create special fund like the Global Tourism Resilient fund to support projects aiming to improve the resilience in the tourism industry, to ensure that nations are prepared to manage and recover from future crisis. The tourism sector should also be diversified including exploring sports and culture tourism.

Closing segment

In the closing segment, the Mayor of New York City, Mr. Eric Adams, spoke on the importance of sustainability and highlighting the initiative that are carried out by the city. The public transit system was mentioned as providing an alternative to cars and vehicles and ensuring New York City is a low carbon emitting city. The role of the private sector was accentuated, and examples such as using locally sourced food, reusing material in their design, and waste reduction were provided. Mr. Adams also highlighted parts of the green economy plan, such as creating green and innovation centers. He finally stressed that throughout this process the city of New York is also focused of equity in opportunities for the people.

In his closing remarks, the Secretary-General of UN Tourism highlighted the need for public-private partnerships to help tourism further develop into a sustainable and resilient industry. In addition, he stated that, in order to build a tourism sector that can work for everyone, there is a need to harness the power of trusted data. The Secretary-General indicated UN Tourism's commitment to the youth, education, and training, and to work closely with governments and the private sector to ensure employment opportunities remain stimulating. The Secretary-General also recalled that the international community will commemorate the International Year for Sustainable and Resilient Tourism in 2027.

In conclusion, the President of the General Assembly stressed the importance of tourism to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There is a need to invest in sustainability and resilience across tourism's deep value chains for the benefit and empowerment the people on a local, national, regional, and international level. He mentioned that as a result of the SF-MST, the world will be able to value and assess the impact of tourism on this. The hope was expressed that the views and ideas exchanged during this high-level thematic event would inspire not only actions in countries and regions but also at the United Nations as preparations are ongoing for the Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States, and the Summit of the Future.



**United Nations General Assembly
High-level Meeting on Sustainable Transport**

Wednesday, 17 April 2024
General Assembly Hall, UN Headquarters

SUMMARY

On 17 April 2024, the President of the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session, H.E. Mr. Dennis Francis, convened the High-Level Meeting on Sustainable Transport as part of the Sustainability Week, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The event aimed to highlight sustainable and effective solutions to improve the balance between economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable transport, and to take full advantage of sustainable transport in accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Opening segment

The President of the General Assembly, H.E. Dennis Francis, highlighted the significant role of transport sector in global output and economic growth, and recalled that over 1 billion people still lack access to all-weather roads, making ensuring equal access the foremost priority for the international community on sustainable transport. He also stressed the particular challenges faced by countries in special situations: Landlocked Developing Countries, Small Island Developing States, and Least Developed Countries as well as vulnerable communities. He highlighted that the upcoming UN Decade of Sustainable Transport, starting in 2026, presents a unique opportunity to recalibrate the global approach towards the transformative power of sustainable transport. He stressed that sustainable transport is not merely an option but a catalyst to drive progress across multiple fronts of sustainable development, calling for innovation-driven approaches to promote multimodal and intermodal transport system, and to confront the negative impacts and consequences of transport.

Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Li Junhua reported that the transport sector is responsible for a quarter of the global greenhouse gases emissions and has a low share of renewable energy use. Mr. Li called for increasing efficiency of transport system, reducing fossil fuel use, and further investments in public transport. He stressed that each milestone should be celebrated, highlighted that the shipping industry, as one sector that of a 20 percent increase in greenhouse gas emissions over the last decade, is taking steps in the right direction. He noted that the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs has been tasked to develop the implementation plan for the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport, in collaboration with the UN regional commissions, and in consultation with the Member States, the wider UN system, and relevant stakeholders. He noted that the High-Level Meeting on Sustainable Transport provided a great opportunity to gain further insight into the current and emerging priorities for the global community on sustainable transport.

Mr. Batyr Annaev, Minister and Chairman of the Türkmendeňizderýaýollary Agency, Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan, on behalf of H.E. Serdar Berdimuhamedow, President of Turkmenistan, underscored the importance of transport at the global level and mentioned the General Assembly's

recent designation of 26 November as the World Sustainable Transport Day. He highlighted Turkmenistan's national transport strategy approaches, including a program for transport diplomacy to identify areas for further capacity building, as well as international cooperation in enhancing transport systems.

Multi-stakeholder panel

There was a report on transport initiatives by the UN Regional Commissions: the launch of the Africa Integrated High-speed Railway Network project, by the African Union, with the support of the Economic Commission for Africa; the introduction of the Integrated Transport System by The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia; the establishment of a regional cooperation mechanism on low carbon transport, by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; the efforts to integrate various transport projects to improve urban life, by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; and the work of the Economic Commission for Europe on road safety and regulatory functions.

Public transport was presented as one of the key solutions to the challenges posed by climate change, urban sprawl, congestion, and economic and social marginalization. Ambitious political leadership, prioritization of efficient transport, stable and long-term funding, and effective governance were highlighted. Countries were suggested to consider ambitious transport mode shift targets when updating their Nationally Determined Contributions for climate by 2025.

It was underlined that intermodal mobility networks and supply chains need to be robust and resilient to crises, such as natural disasters and conflicts. It is critical to eliminate legislative obstacles, to create a regulatory environment with real business incentives, and to offer creative carbon free transport solutions, in order to provide resilient and socially inclusive transport services. Three specific suggestions were provided: first, global coordination on transport should be accompanied by appropriate stakeholder engagement; second, performance indicators must be established to help monitor progress; and third, encourage partnerships with the road transport industry to implement real changes.

Ten key transformations were identified to support transport delivery on equity, sustainability, and climate goals: (1) maximizing accessibility and minimizing environmental impact; (2) promoting compact cities and sustainable infrastructure; (3) connecting rural and urban communities; (4) prioritizing public transport and active mobility; (5) shaping transport behavior; (6) electrifying transport modes and integrating them with local renewable energy production; (7) reflecting "true costs" and green investments; (8) promoting efficient freight transport systems; (9) promoting coherent industry, trade, and transport policies towards circular economies; and (10) investing in resilient infrastructure. There was a suggestion that the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport should include a shared vision for the required transformation by mid-century that is centered on people and planet, and the implementation plan should identify targets of global reach for local impact, particularly for low- and middle-income countries, and lever more and better investment in transport systems.

Member States are also urged to join the UN Group of Friends of Sustainable Transport. Two concrete measures for the upcoming UN Decade of Sustainable Transport were highlighted: first, to

develop a specific questionnaire to be distributed among representatives of the global business community and leading sectoral organizations, in order to better understand priorities, expectations, and possible downfalls in future activities; and second, the promoting mutual recognition of authorized economic operators to reduce costs and transit time along multimodal transport corridors without compromising security and customs consideration.

Plenary segment

During the plenary segment, as well as interactive dialogue of the multi-stakeholder panel, representatives of the Member States and Observers, as well as the UN System and other stakeholders delivered statements and made interventions. There was a broad recognition of the importance of sustainable transport in achieving economic growth, social development, and environmental sustainability. A summary of the main messages is as follows:

- The importance of the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport was highlighted. This initiative holds immense significance in advancing sustainable transport, creating new opportunities, and fostering sustainable development on a global scale. Sustainable transport should address people's needs to access opportunities, services, and goods, while advancing economic and social development, with minimal environmental impact.
- There is a need to dramatically improve access to multimodal and intermodal transfer systems, making transport a solution for the equity, sustainability, and climate challenges that we are facing. While new technological solutions, resilient infrastructure and renewable fuels are needed.
- Due to their geographical and infrastructure deficiencies, LLDCs face unique development challenges, including high transport costs that discourage investors and undermine LLDCs' competitiveness, limiting their capacity to achieve sustainable development. Reliance on neighboring countries to access international markets makes LLDCs more vulnerable to cross-border restrictions and supply chain disruptions.
- There is a need to ensure that landlocked developing countries can become truly "land-linked" through effective transit corridors. Several actions in support of the LLDCs were mentioned, including upgrading transport connectivity with neighboring countries, utilizing existing UN multilateral conventions, such as the TIR Convention, and ensuring international support for leveraging additional infrastructure financing.
- In general, better utilization of existing solutions, such as UN Conventions, digitalized transport services, eliminating regulatory and procedural barriers to transport and trade was highlighted.
- Speakers highlighted the need to ensure that all transport modes: inland, maritime and aviation, contribute to making transport more sustainable. Regarding aviation, the Single African Air Transport Market, launched in 2018, was specifically cited as a project of the African Union 2063 Agenda to create a single unified air transport market in Africa to advance the liberalization of aviation in the continent impetus to the economic integration agenda.
- Over the last decade only 6 to 7 per cent of passenger journeys were made by rail, even though rail transport holds great potential for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing accessibility and safety of transport. Proposals were made to ensure a modal shift towards

public transport, active transport modes such as walking and cycling, and rail. Actions that increase access to rail transport system globally could include setting specific targets within the NDCs, providing policy and fiscal incentives, and increasing investments in order to increase both passenger and freight rail transport.

- Establishing a sustainable and interconnected transport network is critical for enabling trade, economic growth, and social development. Climate change is contributing to increased fragilities in developing countries across the world, particularly many SIDS face additional challenges due to their geography and vulnerability. While some of these challenges can be addressed at the local level, others necessitate global support and action for increasing resilience of transport infrastructure and networks.
- Numerous speakers highlighted the need to prioritize safety in transport policies. The Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030 and the road safety related targets in the 2030 Agenda should be fully implemented. Education and driver training were mentioned as some of the key, affordable measures for enhancing road safety.
- Most participants reiterated the importance of increased political will and international cooperation, in order to leverage technology transfer and capacity building, financing, private sector expertise, and innovation to support the development of sustainable transport opportunities.

Annex

President of the General Assembly Suggestions to the implementation plan for the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport

The following substantive and action-oriented points contributing to the implementation plan for the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport were discussed:

- To include a shared vision for the transformation of transport system by mid-century that is centered on people and planet.
- To ensure equal access to sustainable transportation for the most vulnerable people.
- To enhance capacity building, particularly for low- and middle-income countries.
- To highlight the special challenges and needs of LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS, and maximize synergy with relevant Programs of Action.
- To build resilience on transport infrastructure.
- To promote more public, private and innovative investment in transport and mobility systems.
- To involve the private sector and leading sectoral organizations, in order to better understand priorities, expectations, and possible downfalls in future activities.
- To leverage the power of science and technology, and to accelerate modal shifts and green transition in transport sector.
- To further strengthen international cooperation, including develop international and regional transport and transit corridors, share best practices on implementing national transport strategies and programs.
- To identify targets of local impact by global reach.
- To fully reflected road safety targets related to 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- To establish indicators to monitor the progress during the Decade.

United Nations General Assembly Informal dialogue on building resilience and promoting sustainable development through infrastructure connectivity

Thursday, 18 April 2024
General Assembly Hall, UN Headquarters

SUMMARY

On April 18, 2024, the President of the General Assembly for its seventy-eighth session convened an informal dialogue on "Building resilience and promoting sustainable development through infrastructure connectivity" in accordance with General Assembly resolution 77/282, as part of the first-ever General Assembly Sustainability Week. The informal dialogue sought to generate momentum and raise ambition to enhance investments in quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure, including a risk-informed approach to infrastructure development and management. The dialogue also served as a platform to share good practices, strategies and proposals to boost collaboration and partnerships within and between regions and to engage on means of implementation, including innovative financing mechanisms to support improved connectivity, resilience, and quality of infrastructure systems.

Opening segment

The President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Dennis Francis, emphasized the central role of resilient and well-planned infrastructure in mitigating the adverse impacts of climate change and geological events. Sustainable and eco-friendly infrastructure, including renewable energy and digital platforms, was underscored as essential for long-term global development. The President also underscored the imperative to achieve quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure which necessitates substantial financing and investment. The implementation of innovative financing mechanisms and leveraging blended finance models were also highlighted as a critical contribution to this end. It was indicated that the disproportionate impact of infrastructure gaps on the most vulnerable countries, Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), was quite prevalent. Over 70 per cent of people in LDCs lacked access to basic infrastructure services such as electricity, clean water and sanitation; transportation costs in LLDCs were 50 per cent higher on average, making them less competitive in global markets; and in some SIDS, loss from transport assets accounted for up to 46 per cent of the total annual non- agricultural asset losses – primarily resulting from natural hazards such as hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, and floods.

The President of the Republic of Poland, H.E. Mr. Andrzej Duda, elaborated on the strategic importance of regional infrastructure connectivity as a pivotal instrument for global resilience and sustainable development, noting the strong co-sponsorship of the mandating resolution by 80 countries and its adoption by consensus. H.E. Duda highlighted the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) as a successful regional project aimed at boosting connectivity and economic stability in the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Sea regions. The initiative served as a proactive measure for crisis prevention and resilience building, particularly relevant in the current geopolitical context.

Under-Secretary-General (USG) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Li Junhua, speaking on behalf of the UN Secretary-General, outlined the critical need for the identification and implementation of solutions to address infrastructure challenges as a key enabler for achieving sustainable development and enhancing eco-friendly infrastructure for a sustainable future. USG Li highlighted the importance of resilient infrastructure frameworks, which were crucial not only during times of stability but especially in crises. Such frameworks acted as critical safeguards against disruptive changes, reducing loss and damage caused by extreme weather and geological events.

Plenary segment

In the plenary segment, Member States discussed the importance of enhancing global infrastructure to foster economic stability and development, with interventions structured around three central themes: the necessity of resilient infrastructure, the relevance of proactive initiatives, and the global commitment to sustainable development through enhanced connectivity. Member States showcased national strategies and announced commitments and national infrastructure investment plans aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Many underscored the importance of infrastructure in economic resilience and sustainable development, especially in the face of climate-related disasters. There was collective recognition of the critical need for increased investment in infrastructure, both from public and private sources, to bridge existing gaps. This was particularly emphasized for LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS, which faced unique challenges, and required specific solutions to address infrastructure needs. There was acknowledgement on the value of a collaborative approach to infrastructure development through the use of international partnerships, innovative financing mechanisms, and inclusive strategies.

Several delegations outlined their national commitments to advancing quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure. The EU and its members presented its Global Gateway strategy, aimed at connecting the world through sustainable infrastructure investments. African countries highlighted the cost of infrastructure gaps on the continent, representing approximately 2 per cent of GDP annually. The Infrastructure Development in Africa Initiative had secured funding and was a key driver for achieving regional growth and integration. Small Island Developing States stressed their vulnerability to climate impacts and emphasized the urgent need for resilient maritime and digital infrastructure to ensure economic and environmental sustainability. Gaps in access to quality infrastructure, particularly in areas such as energy, ICT and transport persisted, and new infrastructure projects remained a challenge for certain countries due to limited resources, manpower and technical expertise.

Drawing on the interconnections with other events of Sustainability Week, several Member States highlighted their initiatives in enhancing infrastructure for transport, tourism and trade, including commitments to bolster infrastructure resilience across land, maritime and digital connectivity. It was noted that investments in infrastructure were not commensurate with the needs of developing countries, particularly due to a financing gap, resulting in many countries without the domestic resources to fund necessary infrastructure projects. The creation of a mechanism for a pipeline of bankable projects to allow developing countries to enhance both public and private investments was referred as a key recommendation. The proposal called for

the establishment of a platform convened by the United Nations to bring together relevant stakeholders to assist developing countries in executing such projects. Additionally, the role of regional initiatives, like the Three Seas Initiative, was highlighted by several Member States for its significance in enhancing energy security and economic stability in the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Sea regions.

Multistakeholder Panels

The first panel addressed the overarching challenges and emerging solutions in building resilient infrastructure. Mobilizing finance, lack of data and monitoring of infrastructure needs, and coping with changing infrastructure requirements in the context of climate change were highlighted as key challenges. Approximately 70 per cent of financial risk and exposure faced by infrastructure investments was related to climate variability, the panel explained. Two-thirds of all infrastructure risk was concentrated in the transport and power sectors across developing countries, underscoring the critical need for prioritization. Infrastructure damage caused by disasters, often leading to costly repairs and reconstruction, necessitated not only new construction but also significant upgrades to existing facilities.

The urgency for upgraded data systems and analytical tools, as global public goods to enhance resilience was highlighted in the context of the multi-dimensional impact of infrastructure on various SDG targets. It was also underscored that infrastructure resilience – in line with relevant targets under SDG9 and SDG11 – was a significant contribution to the safe, sustainable and people-centered urban development. In this respect, it was noted that resilient infrastructure facilitated economic growth, education, and access to critical services for all populations, but particularly those that were most vulnerable. Means of implementation required for mass mobilization of finances and investment for resilient infrastructure and public-private partnerships could be leveraged to co-create plans and integrate principles for resilience and response into every stage of the investment process.

The second panel focused on the role of partnerships and innovative financing in fostering infrastructure resilience. Investment in critical infrastructure was essential for achieving 90 per cent of SDG targets, however, current infrastructure practices contributed significantly to global greenhouse gas emission. This underscored the urgent need for sustainable and resilient infrastructure practices to advance sustainable development and environmental sustainability.

The discussion detailed that several barriers to the achievement of sustainable and resilient infrastructure resilience persisted, especially the significant financing gap, particularly in low and middle-income countries. In some instances, despite available financing, a significant portion of financing stemming from international financial institutions remained undistributed in low-income countries highlighting the need to strengthen capacity for effective project implementation. Governance challenges such as inefficient regulatory frameworks and a lack of transparency and accountability were recognized as key bottlenecks, hampering the development and deployment of sustainable infrastructure solutions.

Opportunities and recommendations were proffered in support of scaling-up investment in resilient infrastructure. Diversified funding sources, including sovereign green bonds and municipal bonds, which could unlock capital from multilateral development banks or pension funds. The concept of Contingent Resilient Linked Bonds (CORL) was presented, which lowered

interest rates as resilience measures were implemented, providing credit enhancement based on fulfilling resilience criteria. Innovative financial instruments like the CORL bonds could be utilized as a potential solution to attract private investment and enhance public spending efficiency. This mechanism aimed to enhance the creditworthiness of investments by aligning financial returns with resilience outcomes.

Innovative strategies extended beyond traditional financial models to foster infrastructure resilience, the panel explained. The use of convertible debt structures exemplified how grants could transform into loans or equity, offering adaptable solutions for infrastructure initiatives was mentioned as an example. This shift reflected a broader trend among multilateral development banks towards embracing more flexible lending practices and incorporating novel financial instruments, such as green bonds and guarantees. These tools were designed to mitigate risks and mobilize private capital into low-income regions, demonstrating a collaborative effort to enhance infrastructure investment. This approach not only addressed financial barriers but also aligned with global efforts to build partnerships and implement innovative solutions that contributed to sustainable development goals.

Strong calls were made for enhanced cooperation among international partners, governments, and the private sector to deploy innovative strategies in governance, regulatory frameworks and project delivery to advance more investment in infrastructure.



United Nations General Assembly

Global Stocktaking Marking the Completion of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All to Further Accelerate the Implementation of SDG 7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Friday, 19 April 2024
General Assembly Hall, UN Headquarters

SUMMARY

As part of the Sustainability Week, the United Nations General Assembly convened the global stocktaking marking the completion of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All to further accelerate the implementation of SDG 7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 77/170. The global stocktaking is aimed to review progress achieved at the end of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All, 2014-2024, and to raise ambition and accelerate action towards attaining SDG 7, by catalyzing innovative solutions, investments, and multi-stakeholder partnerships. The global stocktaking was preceded by regional and thematic consultations, supported by the Secretariat and in collaboration with UN-Energy and relevant United Nations system entities.

Opening the global stocktaking, the President of the General Assembly underscored that the Decade of Sustainable Energy for All was launched with ambitious yet achievable objectives – to usher in a future where everyone, everywhere, benefits equally from the innovations and potential of sustainable energy. To achieve these ambitions, the President of the General Assembly emphasized that urgent action must be taken to increase investments in sustainable and modern energy, enhance multistakeholder partnerships to source innovations and expand means of implementation, as well as to sustain political momentum through international cooperation and multilateral agreement on sustainable energy.

Further in the opening, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Sustainable Energy for All stressed that the international community must work together to galvanize greater support to ensure that energy is placed at the center of the sustainable development agenda. She highlighted one of the exemplary collective actions is the Energy Compact, which have mobilized USD 1.3 trillion in commitments for investments in SDG7 from 2022 through to 2030.

Following on, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs reported on the results of regional and thematic consultations that supported the preparations for the global stocktaking. According to the Under-Secretary-General, the consultations highlighted the need to dramatically scale-up finance and investment in sustainable energy, to take into account national circumstances and priorities in advancing a just energy transition, and to establish enabling institutional arrangements at the global level to follow-up on the Decade.

Participants of the global stocktaking shared the view that despite challenges towards achieving SDG 7, significant strides have been made throughout the Decade to ensure affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all. Participants view that SDG 7 can be achieved, as the Decade has brought forward-looking policies, social movements, groundbreaking technological advancements, and unwavering investments. Participants underlined that more efforts need to be made and inclusivity must be put forward, including the empowerment of women and youth.

On closing the energy access gap and transitioning to decarbonized energy systems, participants highlighted the efforts to prioritize energy access and affordability, particularly to electricity and clean cooking solutions. Participants also noted that the shift to a cleaner and sustainable energy system will drive the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Participants further noted that energy transitions must be just, orderly, and equitable, as well as inclusive, while paying particular attention to people living in special situations. Participants also elaborated efforts to advance platforms in facilitating investments and sharing best practices, for instance, in energy resilience, renewable energy technology, and energy storage systems. Ideas to establish and invest in a fund to assist in ensuring universal access to clean energy was also discussed. Furthermore, participants noted the need to reform the energy sector, including global energy governance, and to realize energy efficiency mechanisms that reduce externalities.

On addressing energy's interlinkages with other sectors and efforts to strengthen means of implementation and partnerships, participants underlined that broad access to clean and sustainable energy must be guaranteed to ensure sustainability and prosperity. Energy is linked to two thirds of the overall SDGs targets, hence resilient energy systems will support poverty eradication, food and water security, health, education, and decent work, among others. Participants also noted the effects of energy systems towards climate change. Therefore, collective action would be necessary, especially in strengthening cooperation to ensure means of implementation, financing, infrastructure and technology, building technical capacity, and innovation.

Overall, participants echoed the need to accelerate the transitions to a clean and sustainable energy system, while paying attention to different national situations, priorities, pathways, and approaches. New commitments in the energy compacts are also needed to realize sustainable energy for all. International cooperation must be enhanced, and follow-up actions must be made beyond the Decade. Participants also noted that the global stocktaking could contribute to the deliberations in other multilateral forum, such as SIDS4, UNFCCC COP29, and the Summit of the Future.

At the closing of the global stocktaking, the President of the United Nations General Assembly launched the "Call to Action – Further Acceleration of the Implementation of SDG 7 towards 2030 and Beyond", as attached. Delegations are invited to indicate their support for the Call to Action by contacting the Office of the President of the General Assembly.
