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Eradication of poverty and other development issues

Implementation of the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018–2027)

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In the present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [74/234](#), the Secretary-General reviews the progress made, including by the United Nations system, in implementing the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018–2027), examines gaps and challenges in that regard and the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The report concludes with a set of recommendations.

* [A/75/150](#).



I. Introduction

1. Two years after the proclamation of the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018–2027), the world is facing a catastrophic pandemic that could reverse the development gains achieved over the past decades. The present report contains a review of recent progress made in implementing the Third Decade, an assessment of gaps and challenges in eradicating poverty and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a summary of work done by the United Nations system to implement the inter-agency, system-wide plan of action for poverty eradication and recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly.

II. Progress in eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions

A. Income poverty

2. The remarkable progress in income poverty reduction that the world had experienced since 1990 slowed in the past few years and may be reversed owing to the impact of COVID-19. The global rate of extreme poverty (the proportion of the population living below the international poverty line of \$1.90 a day) dropped by more than one percentage point per year on average between 1990 and 2013 from 36 per cent to 11.2 per cent.¹ Since 2015, however, the rate of decrease has dropped to less than half a percentage point per year from 10 per cent to 8.2 per cent.² It is estimated that more than 700 million people still lived in extreme poverty in 2015, over 60 per cent of them in middle-income countries and the rest in low-income, fragile States. Tens of millions of people will be pushed into poverty because of COVID-19 (see section III) in 2020.

3. Most of the developing countries of Asia have continued to make significant progress. In the East Asia-Pacific region, the extreme poverty rate dropped from 2.3 per cent in 2015 to 1.3 per cent in 2018. In South Asia, the rate dropped from 16.1 per cent in 2013 to 12.3 per cent in 2015³ but the subregion still has the second highest level of poverty in the world. In the Europe-Central Asia region, the rate decreased from 1.6 per cent to 1.2 per cent between 2015 and 2018.⁴

4. The Middle East and North Africa has seen an increase in extreme poverty since 2011, with the rate doubling from 3.8 per cent in 2015 to 7.2 per cent in 2018, accompanied by a significant increase in the number of extremely poor people. The regional trend was driven by the significant increases in poverty levels in conflict-afflicted countries.⁵

5. Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced an increase in poverty. Between 2015 and 2018, the rate of extreme poverty went from 4.1 per cent to 4.4 per cent. In Latin America, based on national poverty measures, the number of poor people increased from 174 million in 2015⁶ to 186 million in 2019.⁷ The number

¹ See <http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/povOnDemand.aspx>.

² Daniel Mahler and others, “The impact of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) on global poverty: why sub-Saharan Africa might be the region hardest hit”, *World Bank Data Blog* (2020).

³ No valid estimate could be computed for 2018 owing to low survey coverage.

⁴ See <http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/povOnDemand.aspx>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Social Panorama of Latin America 2019* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.II.G.6).

⁷ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, “Latin America and the Caribbean and the COVID-19 pandemic: economic and social effects”, *Special Report COVID-19*, No. 1 (April, 2020).

living in extreme poverty rose from 52 million and 67 million. Poverty in Latin America strikes children, adolescents and young people, women, rural dwellers, indigenous peoples and Afrodescendants especially hard.

6. The world is not on track to eradicate the scourge of extreme poverty by 2030. The rate that year is projected to still be 7.4 per cent, or more than 600 million people living on less than \$1.90 a day, given forecast per capita growth rates in gross domestic product (GDP) and current income inequality levels in each country.⁸

B. Non-income poverty

7. The extent of poverty is higher when it is defined in terms of the non-monetary deprivation that people face in their daily lives. In 2019, 23.1 per cent of the world population (1.3 billion people) was suffering from multidimensional poverty. More than two thirds of them were living in middle-income countries and half were children. Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia were home to the great majority of such people.⁹

8. Since 2015, the global prevalence of undernourishment has remained at around 11 per cent, meaning an increase in the number of undernourished people to 822 million in 2018, similar to the number registered a decade earlier.¹⁰ In terms of malnutrition, stunting still affected 149 million children under 5 years of age worldwide in 2019, while wasting impacted an additional 47 million children. Overweight and obesity also continue to affect children and adults in all regions.¹¹

9. Many people lack access to basic services despite significant improvement. In 2017, 1 in 10 people (785 million) did not use safely managed or basic drinking water services.¹² In 2018, 24 per cent of the world's urban population (more than 1 billion people) lived in slums or informal settlements, mainly in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Their number is projected to reach 3 billion by 2030.¹³

C. Reduction of inequalities

10. A rise in inequality of economic outcomes, which manifests itself in an increasing concentration of income and wealth in the hands of people at the top of the income distribution, is being experienced in a majority of countries. From 1990 to 2015, the share of income going to the richest 1 per cent of the population increased in 59 out of 100 countries with data.¹⁴ In 2019, the world's 2,153 billionaires had more wealth than 4.6 billion people.¹⁵ Differences between urban and rural dwellers, as well as between members of vulnerable social groups and the rest of the population,

⁸ Christoph Lakner and others, "How much does reducing inequality matter for global poverty", *Global Poverty Monitoring Technical Note*, No. 13 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, June 2020).

⁹ Sabina Alkire and others, *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2019: Illuminating Inequalities* (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2019).

¹⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and others, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019. Safeguarding Against Economic Slowdowns and Downturns* (Rome, 2019).

¹¹ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO) and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, *Levels and Trends in Child Malnutrition: Key Findings of the 2020 Edition of the Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates* (Geneva, WHO, 2020).

¹² UNICEF and WHO, *Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene 2000–2017: Special Focus on Inequalities* (2019).

¹³ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.I.6).

¹⁴ *World Social Report 2020: Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.IV.1).

¹⁵ Oxfam, "Time to Share", Oxfam Briefing Paper (January 2020).

explain a significant part of observed economic inequality. If, for each country, income inequality (as measured by the Gini index) were reduced by 1 per cent per year and the GDP per capita growth rate proceeded as projected by the World Bank, 89 million fewer people would be living in extreme poverty by 2030.¹⁶

11. Inequality of opportunity in terms of access to education, health care and decent work, and the ability to partake in social and political life, is pronounced and gaps between population groups are not closing fast enough. Disparities are declining in the fulfilment of basic needs, such as improved child health and primary education completion, but inequalities persist or are growing in enhanced capabilities, such as access to higher education and the Internet, especially in the current context of rapid technological innovation, climate change, urbanization and international migration, with their effects on labour markets.¹⁷

III. Impact of COVID-19, global recession and climate change

12. The COVID-19 pandemic poses a serious challenge to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal of ending poverty by 2030. It also makes the world's pledge to leave no one behind and to reach those furthest behind first much more difficult to achieve. It has laid bare the immense challenges facing the world, ranging from pervasive structural inequalities to inadequate health infrastructure and the lack of universal basic social protection. The distance to travel on implementing the Third Decade now appears especially daunting.

13. The world economy, which was already fragile and slowing down amid rising national populism, protectionism and geopolitical tensions, has been plunged into a deep recession by the pandemic. The unprecedented restrictions imposed on movement and activity to slow the spread of the coronavirus have caused severe reductions in the demand for, and supply of, goods, services and labour. According to the United Nations *World Economic Situation and Prospects as of mid-2020*, world GDP will contract by 3.2 per cent in 2020 and rebound only modestly in 2021, despite massive policy support. It is also projected that \$8.5 trillion cumulative output losses during 2020 and 2021 will erase nearly all output gains of the previous four years. The drop in per capita incomes will have a particularly adverse impact on low-income households, jeopardize decades of progress in reducing extreme poverty and exacerbate already high levels of inequality. In 2020, the share of the world's population living in extreme poverty is forecast to increase to 8.6 per cent, representing an additional 71 million people pushed into extreme poverty.¹⁸ More than 1.52 billion children and young people are out of school or university owing to closures and acute hunger, unemployment and working poverty are projected to rise significantly.

14. Lockdown measures are also expected to result in substantial increases in poverty and inequality in all European countries.¹⁹ However, low- and middle-income countries with underdeveloped health-care systems, large informal sectors, large populations, the near-impossibility of implementing social distancing measures in high-density urban areas, especially in slums and informal settlements, a lack of access to basic services, constrained fiscal policy space and high risk of debt distress are particularly vulnerable to the lasting effects of the pandemic. This predicament underscores the imperative to tackle extreme poverty in all countries, particularly in developing countries.

¹⁶ Christoph Lakner and others, "How much does reducing inequality matter".

¹⁷ *World Social Report 2020*.

¹⁸ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.I.7).

¹⁹ Juan C. Palomino, Juan Gabriel Rodríguez, Raquel Sebastian, "Inequality and poverty effects of the lockdown in Europe", Vox EU (CEPR, June 2020).

15. Despite its devastating impacts, the crisis offers an opportunity to reset socioeconomic policies for a better recovery, including by reallocating public resources through broad-based fiscal stimulus measures to promote investment in universal health care, education and social protection and to keep micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises afloat. The United Nations is calling for a coordinated and comprehensive multilateral solidarity response amounting to at least 10 per cent of global GDP in order to help developing countries to respond to the immediate health threat posed by the pandemic and to tackle the many socioeconomic dimensions of the crisis. Such a response would focus on women, young people, low-wage workers, small and medium-sized enterprises, informal workers and vulnerable groups that are already at risk.²⁰

16. The current climate crisis also poses a serious threat to the world's economic prospects but it tends to affect poorer countries more. Within countries, people living in poverty and other vulnerable groups are disproportionately exposed to climate change because of where they live (rural areas in the majority of cases), the economic activities in which they engage (mainly agriculture and fishing) and the infrastructure and services to which they have access. By threatening the world's food supply, driving people from their homes and jeopardizing livelihoods, climate change increases the risk of hunger, conflict and poverty. It is estimated that climate change will push from 3 million to 16 million people into poverty by 2030, under a low-impact scenario where powerful mitigation and adaption strategies are successful.²¹ Recovery from the COVID-19 crisis also presents an opportunity to build back greener.

IV. Gaps and challenges faced in implementing the Third Decade

A. Data gaps and challenges

17. Most countries do not regularly collect data for more than half of the Sustainable Development Goals indicators. In 2018, data were available for only 20 per cent of the indicators in Africa and Asia and capacity to collect them was heavily dependent on external assistance.²² Around half of the 155 countries for which the World Bank monitors data faced challenges in producing timely or any poverty estimates between 2002 and 2011.²³ Furthermore, available data are often insufficiently disaggregated to allow proper tracking of progress on various non-income dimensions of poverty.

18. The COVID-19 pandemic is worsening the situation and exacerbating global data inequalities. The need to protect the health and safety of field staff and the public has seen Governments adapt or delay planned field operations, including data collection. Data, however, is required now more than ever in order to inform emergency mitigation decisions. That requires well-coordinated and strategic partnerships to produce the required data that will help drive the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals.

B. Employment creation

19. In 2019, the world's unemployment rate stood at 5.4 per cent and was expected to remain the same over the following two years. At the same time, some 2 billion workers were employed informally and more than 630 million lived in extreme or

²⁰ United Nations, "Shared responsibility, global solidarity: responding to the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19" (March 2020).

²¹ *World Social Report 2020*.

²² *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.I.6).

²³ Umar Serajuddin and others, "Data deprivation, another deprivation to end", Policy Research Working Paper, No. 7252 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, April 2015).

moderate poverty. Substantial disparities in the labour market also existed. In 2019, the labour force participation rate was much lower for women (47 per cent) than for men (74 per cent).²⁴ The total number of young people in the labour force decreased from 568 million to 497 million between 1999 and 2019²⁵ and about 267 million were not in employment, education or training in 2019.

20. COVID-19 has driven more than 200 million people out of work²⁶ and has disproportionately affected those who were already in challenging situations: women, young people and workers in low-wage, part-time, informal sector and precarious employment have been the hardest hit. Given the magnitude of the disruption to economic activity, it will take much longer for countries to regain the lost jobs and reboot efforts to eradicate poverty and combat inequality.²⁷

C. Access to quality education

21. Before 2020, progress in education participation was stagnating, with an estimated 258 million children, adolescents and young people (17 per cent of the total) not in school. Regional disparities persist, with sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia lagging behind. Sub-Saharan Africa faces the biggest challenges in terms of basic school resources, with about half of its schools lacking electricity, drinking water, handwashing facilities, computers and the Internet, and trained teachers in 2018.²⁸ The pandemic and the response thereto have further exposed and deepened education inequalities. School closures will affect 310 million school children who rely on school for a regular source of daily nutrition.²⁹ Even if remote learning were provided to many students, vulnerable and disadvantaged children, including girls and those with disabilities, might not have the access to be able to continue learning. The number of dropouts is also likely to increase, government spending might fall and the productivity of working parents could be significantly affected.

22. More than 30 per cent of countries spend less than 4 per cent of GDP on education.³⁰ Of the \$4.7 trillion spent on education every year, only 0.5 per cent is spent in low-income countries while 65 per cent is spent in high-income countries, even though the two groups of countries have almost the same number of school-age children. In low-income countries, households cover 20 per cent of the cost of education, picking up a larger education bill than in high-income countries. Developed countries are encouraged to deliver on their commitments in relation to official development assistance (ODA) in order to boost funding for education in low-income countries.³¹

D. Access to quality health care and services

23. The world has made tremendous progress in health outcomes. The under-5 mortality rate fell to 39 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2018, from 93 deaths per 1,000 in 1990.³² The maternal mortality ratio declined by 38 per cent between 2000 and

²⁴ International Labour Organization (ILO), “ILO monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work”, No. 2 (Geneva, 7 April 2020).

²⁵ ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Technology and the Future of Jobs* (Geneva, 2020).

²⁶ ILO, “ILO monitor”.

²⁷ United Nations, *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women* (April 2020).

²⁸ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019*.

²⁹ United Nations, *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Children* (April 2020).

³⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Global Education Monitoring Report Summary 2020: Inclusion and Education, All Means All* (Paris, 2020).

³¹ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019*.

³² UNICEF, *Levels and Trends in Child Mortality Report 2019, Estimates developed by the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation* (New York, 2019).

2017, from 342 to 211 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births.³³ About 81 per cent of births globally were attended by skilled health personnel between 2014 and 2019, up from 64 per cent between 2000 and 2006.³⁴ However, progress was uneven across regions and countries and out-of-pocket spending has increased, pushing some 90 million people into extreme poverty between 2000 and 2015.³⁵ Also, overall access to essential health services was still low owing to the inadequacy of service coverage in low-resource settings. In 2017, only between 33 per cent and 49 per cent of the global population obtained essential health services.³⁶

24. A well-coordinated global partnership is required to support countries in need during the COVID-19 crisis, which has infected more than 11.5 million people and caused more than 530,000 deaths.³⁷ It has exposed the weaknesses of unprepared health-care systems around the world and underlined the importance of timely and accurate data for informed preparedness, prevention and response to health emergencies. Countries need to increase spending on health and develop comprehensive strategies to prepare for future health emergencies.

E. Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

25. Women and girls still face multiple challenges, including higher rates of poverty and lack of autonomy in decision-making, even for matters relating to their own sexual and reproductive health. Women also continue to have lower levels of participation in the labour force, work in low-paid settings and earn less than men. Women aged 25 to 34 years are 25 per cent more likely than men to live in extreme poverty.³⁸ The representation of women in single or lower houses of national parliaments was 24.9 per cent as at 1 January 2020. Women held only 27 per cent of managerial positions in 2018. Further, only 57 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 years who are married or in a union make their own decisions about sexual relations and the use of contraceptives and reproductive health services, according to data from 51 countries.³⁹

26. The gender gap in labour force participation among adults from 25 to 54 years of age has stagnated at 31 per cent over the past 20 years and the gender pay gap stands at 16 per cent globally, with women paid up to 35 per cent less than men in some countries.⁴⁰ COVID-19 is exacerbating gender inequality, as women are overrepresented in hard-hit sectors and take on additional care responsibilities. Closing the gender pay gap is critical to achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. The policy tools at the disposal of Governments and policy advocates must address the underlying social and economic structures that continue to discriminate against women.

F. Access to social protection

27. Social protection has been recognized as an essential component of poverty eradication strategies. It is crucial to investing in human capital formation, ensuring access to basic services, managing risk effectively, contributing to economic

³³ WHO, *Trends in Maternal Mortality: 2000 to 2017* (Geneva, 2019).

³⁴ See <https://data.unicef.org/topic/maternal-health/delivery-care/>.

³⁵ WHO, *World Health Statistics 2020: Monitoring Health for the SDG* (Geneva, 2020).

³⁶ WHO, *Primary Health Care on the Road to Universal Health Coverage: 2019 Monitoring Report* (Geneva, 2019).

³⁷ As at 6 July 2020.

³⁸ UN-Women, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: the Gender Snapshot 2019* (New York, 2019).

³⁹ UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2019: Families in a Changing World* (New York, 2019).

⁴⁰ UN-Women, *Gender Equality: Women's Rights in Review 25 Years After Beijing* (New York, 2020).

development, reducing vulnerabilities across the life cycle, narrowing inequalities and fostering inclusive growth. Nonetheless, social protection systems and schemes remain inadequate in many countries. Globally, only 45 per cent of the population is effectively covered by at least one social protection cash benefit; 4 billion people have no social protection. Further, the extent of coverage varies across regions and type of protection system. Only 68 per cent of people above retirement age receive pensions, 22 per cent of the unemployed receive unemployment cash benefits, 28 per cent of persons with severe disabilities receive disability cash benefits and 41 per cent of women with newborns receive maternity cash benefits; only 33 per cent of children are effectively covered by social protection.⁴¹ Informal workers are also less likely to enjoy the benefits of social protection.

28. COVID-19 has underscored the importance of universal social protection. Countries need to invest in building strong, comprehensive and shock-responsive social protection systems. Countries should also scale up existing cash-transfer programmes, eliminate user fees in health care and eradicate bottlenecks to access.

V. Challenges faced by countries in special situations

A. Africa, least developed countries, landlocked least developed countries and small island developing States

29. Extreme poverty has decreased in Africa but at a slower pace than in other developing regions. The rate of extreme poverty fell from 42.3 per cent in 2015 to 41.6 per cent in 2018 in sub-Saharan Africa, but the subregion, owing to rapid population growth, has the highest level of extreme poverty in the world and is home to over half of all people living in extreme poverty.⁴² In 2019, almost half of the 48 countries in the subregion for which data are available still had rates above 40 per cent and nine of them had rates above 60 per cent. Only five countries had rates below 3 per cent, the agreed indicator of no poverty.⁴³

30. Between 2015 and 2019, extreme poverty rates declined in the majority of least developed countries. However, economic growth in most of them remains significantly below levels needed to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030. Only 15 per cent of such countries are growing at a pace close to the Sustainable Development Goals target of at least 7 per cent GDP growth per annum. Much faster economic growth is needed to eradicate world poverty but it must be accompanied by sharp reductions in inequality.

31. Many small island developing States have been unable to achieve sustained high levels of economic growth, owing in part to the high costs associated with their geographical remoteness, small-scale economies and their vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters. Although they have made progress in terms of social inclusion, people in vulnerable situations remain disproportionately affected by poverty, unemployment, inequality and exclusion.⁴⁴

32. The economic fallout from COVID-19 is further worsening the growth prospects of those countries because they rely largely on commodity exports or tourism or because they carry heavy debt burdens.

⁴¹ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019*.

⁴² World Bank, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2018: Piecing Together the Poverty Puzzle* (Washington, D.C., 2018).

⁴³ International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa Macro Poverty Outlook – Spring Meetings 2020* (Washington, D.C., 2020).

⁴⁴ See www.un.org/pga/73/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2019/08/SAMOA-MTR-FINAL.pdf.

B. Countries in conflict and post-conflict situations

33. The World Bank estimates that, by 2030, up to two thirds of people living in extreme poverty will also face fragility, conflict and violence. In sub-Saharan Africa, 43 countries with the highest poverty rates fall into that category. Children living in such countries are particularly vulnerable and nearly 58 per cent of them live in extremely poor households, compared with 17 per cent of children in countries that are considered not to be fragile.⁴⁵

34. Over the past two decades, countries emerging from conflict managed to reduce poverty rates by more than half, to 19 per cent in 2019. In countries that remained affected by conflict, the poverty rate rose from 17 per cent in 2010 to 23 per cent in 2019.⁴⁶ Forging and sustaining peace and inclusive development in fragile and conflict-affected situations can take years but immediate action must be taken to eradicate poverty while investing in peace. To create the conditions for eradicating poverty and ensuring sustained and inclusive growth, conflict, fragility and insecurity must be tackled.

VI. Gaps and challenges in mobilizing resources

35. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, levels of domestic and external resources were already insufficient to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The pandemic will result in a significant reduction in the financing available to developing countries. External private finance inflows to developing economies could drop by \$700 billion in 2020, compared with 2019 levels.⁴⁷ There has been progress in domestic resource mobilization thanks to improvements in tax policies and international tax cooperation but only about 40 per cent of developing countries increased their tax revenue-to-GDP ratios between 2015 and 2018.⁴⁸ In 2017, more than one third of countries eligible for ODA had tax-to-GDP ratios below 15 per cent, the threshold for a State to be functioning effectively.⁴⁹

36. Foreign direct investment dropped by 30 per cent in the period from 2016 to 2017 against a backdrop of rising protectionism.⁵⁰ Total ODA from member countries of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) remained stable over that period but the ODA share of the combined gross national income of those countries was 0.3 per cent in 2019, well below the agreed target of 0.7 per cent. ODA and remittances, which increased between 2016 and 2017, were small compared with flows of foreign direct investment. Only a small share of foreign aid, a little over one third of ODA in 2017, is dedicated to the achievement of social Sustainable Development Goals.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Sabina Alkire and others, *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2019*.

⁴⁶ World Bank, *Fragility and Conflict On the Front Lines of the Fight Against Poverty*, 2020.

⁴⁷ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "The impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) on development finance" (Paris, 2020).

⁴⁸ OECD, "OECD and donor countries working to focus development efforts on COVID-19 crisis, building on a rise in official aid in 2019", 16 April 2020.

⁴⁹ OECD, "The impact of the coronavirus".

⁵⁰ OECD, *Global Outlook on Financing for Sustainable Development 2019: Time to Face the Challenge* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2018).

⁵¹ *Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2020* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.I.4).

VII. Progress made by the United Nations system in accelerating global actions for a world without poverty and implementation of the system-wide action plan

37. In this section, a summary is provided of progress made since late 2018 by the United Nations system in accelerating global action to eradicate poverty by implementing the inter-agency, system-wide plan of action for poverty eradication.⁵² Implementation of the plan is a tangible demonstration of the system's collective action on poverty and inequality in support of national sustainable development strategies. The plan is focused on value that can be added to ongoing United Nations system initiatives and mobilized in the context of the Third Decade. Full implementation of the plan's seven thematic policy areas is all the more urgent in this decade of action and delivery for sustainable development. The plan will help countries to build back better in the wake of COVID-19, given that it highlights the importance of issues such as combating inequality, scaling up the provision of adequate social protection, improving food security and nutrition, and promoting structural transformation, full employment and decent jobs.

A. Supporting structural transformation, productive employment and decent work

38. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) continues to support countries in advancing inclusive and sustainable industrial development through its programmes for country partnership, country programmes and technical cooperation programmes. Programmes for country partnership focus on priority industrial sectors or areas essential to the country's development agenda, in particular those with a strong potential for economic growth and job creation. In 2019, 10 countries were either implementing or in the programming phase of such programmes. UNIDO also supports African countries in implementing the Third Industrial Development Decade for Africa (2016–2025).

39. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) provides economic analysis and offers technical assistance on trade, investment, finance and technology issues. In 2019, UNCTAD carried out several research and capacity-building activities to foster a world without poverty. The key focus of most was to develop productive capacity and transform economies with a view to creating decent employment, fostering prosperity, reducing poverty and promoting inclusive development, particularly in Africa, least developed countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries.

40. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) works to build more sustainable livelihoods and jobs. In the western Balkans, UNDP partners with the International Labour Organization and the World Bank to promote inclusive labour market solutions, delivering services that reach out and enable marginalized groups to enter or re-enter the labour market. UNDP and its partners also support young people through programmes on social innovation and entrepreneurship and leverage partnerships and networks. Examples include YouthConnekt, which is active in 12 African countries and has created 10 million jobs for young people; the Youth Leadership Programme in Arab States, which has worked with more than 7,000 young people and supported more than 5,000 projects; and Youth Co:Lab in Asia and the

⁵² United Nations, Accelerating Global Actions for a World without Poverty: United Nations System-wide Plan of Action for the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018–2027).

Pacific, from which more than 5,000 young entrepreneurs have benefited and which has helped almost 600 start-ups to address challenges relating to the Sustainable Development Goals.

41. Working for Health, a joint programme run by ILO, OECD and WHO, helps countries to expand and transform the health-care and social workforce in the context of Sustainable Development Goals 3, 4, 5 and 8. It has enabled the creation of decent jobs through the development of national workforce strategies, investment plans and work environment improvements that contribute to improved access to and coverage by health services, particularly in rural, remote and underserved areas in 20 priority countries identified as least likely to attain universal health coverage and over 26 pathfinder countries that have demonstrated a strong commitment to innovate and have requested support.

42. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has helped five member States to develop national strategies for leveraging the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) as a means to fight poverty and spur economic growth by identifying strategic sectors and products on which they should focus in that free trade area. The sectors were chosen for their potential to create decent jobs, including for young people and women.

B. Expanding social protection systems to underpin inclusive poverty-reducing development

43. UNDP partners with other agencies in 18 countries to support the implementation of the Joint Fund for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on social protection in areas such as universal and shock-responsive social protection and protection to improve the labour market prospects of people in vulnerable groups. UNDP works with ILO, UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) in the Leadership and Transformation Curriculum on Building and Managing Social Protection Floors in Africa (TRANSFORM), under which government officials received training to improve governance systems, standards and processes.

44. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) supports the strengthening of national and local-level government capacity to design and scale up social protection coverage in rural areas. FAO supports Governments in learning from social protection schemes that have worked in countries with similar socioeconomic conditions. More than 20 African countries have engaged, with support from FAO, in schemes involving South-South and triangular cooperation, which are key tools for promoting the exchange of knowledge and horizontal learning.

45. UNICEF helps countries to address child poverty by expanding social protection programmes and making public expenditure more equitable. There is a focus on expanding child and family benefits, including through the progressive implementation of universal child grants. UNICEF-supported cash-transfer programmes reached more than 51 million children in 78 countries in 2019. In that same year, UNICEF scaled up disability-inclusive social protection programmes to support 1.7 million children with disabilities in 142 countries.

46. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is strengthening national capacity to broaden social protection coverage. The Commission is also developing knowledge and advocacy products, such as its Social Protection Toolbox, an online platform containing information on more than 120 good practices, as well as videos, infographics, animations and online games on topics concerning social protection, and the Social Protection Impact and Financing Tool,

which will help 13 countries to estimate the potential impact of various social protection schemes addressing poverty, inequality and household purchasing power.

47. UN-Women has focused social protection support for countries on capacity development and policy and technical support. Its East and Southern Africa regional office undertook a comprehensive gender-responsive exercise to map existing social protection systems in the subregion and thereby guide policymakers in expanding access to social protection for women in informal employment, including in agriculture, domestic work and informal cross-border trade.

48. ILO is engaged in the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board. In 2019, ILO hosted Global Social Protection Week, in which calls were made to guarantee universal, comprehensive, adapted and sustainable social protection systems for all, including children, young people, women and men, workers in all types of employment, rural populations, persons with disabilities and migrants.

49. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has conducted assessments in 16 countries to understand the barriers faced by people living with and at-risk of HIV in accessing social protection benefits.

50. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs works with ILO to provide technical assistance to low-income, developing countries in order to strengthen social protection systems. Through pilot projects in Cambodia and Pakistan and empirical research, practical tools will be developed to support the development of national capacity.

C. Human capability development: addressing the non-income forms of poverty

51. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has worked with countries in the region on incorporating a gender dimension in non-monetary measures of poverty and of time-use poverty, and is leading the way on poverty and inequality statistics. That has led to the drafting of methodological guidelines on non-monetary indicators to monitor Sustainable Development Goals targets 1.2 and 1.4. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is supporting eight countries in the region in their efforts to develop national multidimensional poverty indices. The Commission also supports the League of Arab States, informing decision makers in member States of the findings emerging from in-depth analysis of the prevalence and characteristics of multidimensional poverty, and offering them technical support and capacity-building. ESCAP has conducted extensive interdisciplinary research and data analysis on non-income forms of deprivation.

52. FAO supports Governments in designing and implementing comprehensive poverty reduction policies, including dedicated policies for small-scale producers and family farmers; diversifying rural livelihoods and enhancing market links and opportunities between urban and rural areas; expanding shock-responsive social protection in rural areas; and fostering participatory territorial development processes. UNDP continues to champion the use of multidimensional poverty indices and has adopted a new “leave no one behind” marker. Support from UNDP has resulted in access to clean, affordable and sustainable energy for 1.2 million households in rural areas and 1.4 million households led by women. Through its partnership with Global Fund, 652 health facilities in eight countries are running on solar energy.

53. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) assists countries with the greatest needs in strengthening supply chains so that women and adolescent girls can have access to a range of contraceptives. UNFPA also works to integrate family-

planning services into primary health care. In 2019, UNFPA issued a new strategy for young people, entitled “My body, my life, my world”. UNESCO, in partnership with UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN-Women and WHO, released the *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* in 2018. UNICEF continued work on measuring and monitoring child poverty. As of 2019, 65 countries routinely measured and monitored multidimensional child poverty. In Burundi, UNICEF supported the establishment of a child poverty working group and, in Myanmar, UNICEF, UNDP and the World Bank have worked together on child poverty analysis. In Lebanon, UNICEF, together with ILO, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and UNDP, has conducted analysis of the impact on economic growth of national capital investments anticipated from donors for use in high-level advocacy.

54. WFP has supported 74 countries in implementing nutrition programmes, providing 17.3 million schoolchildren with meals, snacks or take-home rations, which in turn has led to a reduction in the dropout rate across schools supported by the Programme. Its nutrition-specific activities have reached 17.2 million beneficiaries. WFP continues to operate its SCOPE CODA (conditional on-demand assistance) platform in malnutrition treatment programmes to enable digital beneficiary registration and tracking and on-demand provision of entitlements. In 2019, WFP and its partners and national training institutions provided vocational and service-sector skills development to more than 80,000 people in 16 countries. WHO works with Governments to promote universal health care by fostering policy dialogue on strategic planning and health systems governance. In 2017, it published, in collaboration with UNAIDS, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN-Women and the World Bank, its *Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents (AA-HA!)* manual to facilitate the development of national adolescent health strategies and plans. WHO and UNESCO have launched a new initiative, entitled “Making every school a health promoting school”, through the development and promotion of Global Standards for Health Promoting Schools.

D. The future of food and sustainable agriculture

55. ESCWA, in close cooperation with the League of Arab States, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other organizations, provides technical assistance to member States on food and environment issues and promotes green economy policies and tools. In an effort to protect the poor from the impact of COVID-19, ESCWA advocates establishing a regional social solidarity fund for poor countries.

56. In 2019, FAO convened a joint initiative with international science and financing partners on future food systems and their impact on the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 2 and, with partners, launched the United Nations Decade of Family Farming. FAO continues to support countries in strengthening tenure policies for poorer and more marginalized groups. Working with partners, in particular FAO, UNDP supports the transformation of the global food system at the local level through the adoption of sustainable practices. As part of its new digital strategy, UNDP has identified initiatives with scalable potential. In Ecuador, for example, it has connected small cacao producers to the global market through a chocolate bar, traceable to its origins via blockchain technology.

57. Together with FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and WFP, UN-Women is implementing the Accelerating Progress toward the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women joint programme in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda. The programme engages approximately 49,000 rural women directly and 315,000 household members indirectly to improve food security and nutrition. In 2019, the programme contributed to a 103 per cent average

increase in agricultural production in its target areas; raised more than \$1.8 million from the sale of agricultural produce; ensured that 81 per cent of supported producer organizations were women-led or had women in key leadership positions; organized more than 16,000 women in savings groups; and enhanced the skills of at least 2,000 government officials at all levels on gender mainstreaming, gender-responsive budgeting and women's rights. In Guatemala, Ethiopia and Nepal, the programme supported Governments in the development and implementation of gender policies in the agricultural sector.

58. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), together with FAO, WHO and other partners, has developed guidelines and accompanying case studies and tools on enhancing urban-rural linkages for sustainable urbanization and human settlements. In 2019, UNIDO provided training in Armenia to selected producer groups on environmentally resilient practices and how to develop bankable business plans and funding applications under a project financed by the United Nations trust fund for human security. WFP has developed models that combine broad partnerships, innovative solutions and context-specific support for smallholders and their national Governments, with systemic impact on agricultural value chains and broader food systems. In 2019, WFP implemented training relating to assets creation and other livelihood-support programmes that benefited 9.6 million people in 50 countries. It helped them to address immediate food needs through cash or food-based transfers while they carried out projects to rehabilitate assets, such as roads, water-related assets, forests or degraded land.

59. WFP has applied its three-pronged approach (3PA) for the design, planning and implementation of programmes such as resilience-building in 35 countries. It has also worked with national partners and academic institutions to build national 3PA capacities in Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe, and in five universities across the Sahel. In 2019, WFP helped more than 93,000 farmers, 60 per cent of them women, in seven African countries to obtain access to \$12.2 million in microinsurance coverage through the R4 Rural Resilience Initiative. More than 5,000 of those farmers accessed R4-related insurance products. WFP also helped smallholders in more than 40 countries to gain access to formal markets. Globally, they sold 58,500 metric tons of food commodities, with a value of \$19.1 million, through WFP-supported aggregation systems.

E. Reducing inequalities

60. In its *World Social Report 2020*, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs focused on four global megatrends (technological innovation, climate change, urbanization and international migration) and whether they offer any new possibilities for reducing inequality.

61. UN-Women is striving to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular those on achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women, through a flagship programme on climate-resilient agriculture. It also facilitates the reform of statutory and customary laws, policies and practices to address gender-specific barriers in 19 sub-Saharan African countries.

62. UNDP has helped 17 United Nations country teams to establish frameworks to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, partly through the Spotlight Initiative, a multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls by 2030.

63. In 2018, UNFPA partnered with UNICEF and UN-Women to launch its factsheet on indigenous women's maternal health, the first such document to bring together all the available data on the issue, with recommendations on how to address disparities in terms of maternal health between indigenous and non-indigenous women. In 2019,

it expanded its strategic partnerships to advance equality for and the rights of women and girls of African descent.

64. In 2019, ESCWA released findings emerging from its partnership with the Economic Research Forum and experts from five universities with regard to inequality in Arab countries, focusing on non-income dimensions. They revealed significant intercountry inequalities and some deeply entrenched structural inequalities. ESCWA also undertook capacity-building activities, including the development of an institutional gaps assessment methodology and a social justice barometer for measuring social justice in the policies of Arab countries.

F. Addressing climate change and the intensification of natural hazards

65. FAO contributes to the gender action plan of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). UNDP leverages existing resources for nature-based solutions and, in 2018 and 2019, enabled countries to access over \$1 billion from vertical funds. Funds mobilized in 2019 are expected to benefit 37 million people through integrated initiatives. UNDP also helps 35 countries and numerous United Nations country teams to develop financial plans through the Biodiversity Finance Initiative, and has supported more than 20 countries in leveraging funding for forest-based solutions to climate change.

66. UNEP, with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), co-hosts the secretariat of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Under the UNDP-UNEP Poverty-Environment Initiative, methodologies have been developed to include environmental and natural resources in multidimensional poverty measurement. UNFPA prioritizes its programming in the small island developing States because many are vulnerable to the impact of climate change, particularly in the context of humanitarian responses where women and girls are at increased risk. In order to address those challenges, it increased funding for its Pacific and Caribbean multi-country programmes.

67. UN-Habitat supports climate resilience in cities and human settlements with its resilience profiling and adaptation planning tools. Climate change assessments undertaken in 16 informal settlements in Fiji and 5 in the Solomon Islands, and five peri-urban areas in Mongolia, have benefited nearly 200,000 people. In Mozambique, where 4,000 classrooms were destroyed or damaged in Cyclones Idai and Kenneth, only schools built according to the disaster risk reduction standards of the UN-Habitat Safer Schools Programme withstood the storms.

68. In 2019, UNICEF expanded its climate change programming and 56 country offices engaged in child-inclusive programmes fostering climate resilience. Key activities included policy and implementation support to make social service delivery more climate-resilient, action to combat air pollution and the provision of sustainable energy. UNICEF has stressed at international forums that the climate crisis is also a children's rights crisis. At the United Nations Conference on Climate Change in 2019, it launched the Intergovernmental Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action.

69. UNIDO is helping vulnerable farming communities to adapt to climate change, reduce deforestation and increase income. Biodigesters installed in eight districts now generate biogas for lighting and cooking. More than 1.5 million people have received protective coverage through WFP climate insurance products in nine countries. Some 11,000 vulnerable farmers have received a total of \$276,000 in insurance payments. The WFP forecast-based financing initiative is helping Governments and communities in 14 countries to develop anticipatory means of mitigating the impact of disasters. WFP provided cash transfers of around \$53 each to 4,500 families (25,000 people) three days ahead of a flood disaster in Bangladesh and implemented forecast-based

anticipatory cash transfers of around \$45 each to 1,000 beneficiaries four days ahead of Typhoon Tisoy in the Philippines in December 2019.

G. Fighting poverty in fragile and humanitarian contexts

70. FAO is focusing on anticipatory action and the provision of support to chronically poor households and crisis-affected populations before, during and in the aftermath of a shock and continues to support the development of risk-informed and shock-responsive social protection systems. It is working to strengthen collective action and empower local actors, fostering the economic inclusion of host communities and refugees and promoting the generation of employment and skills training for young people, including refugees, in conflict-prone zones.

71. The UNDP-World Bank Emergency Crisis Response Project in Yemen has helped to improve the livelihoods of some 742,000 direct and 4.7 million indirect beneficiaries, generating more than 10.7 million workdays of emergency employment. Under its Regional Refugee and Resilience Response Plan for the Syrian crisis, UNDP is integrating livelihoods with social protection in support of more than 850,000 refugees and host communities in five countries. In the Sudan, UNDP is helping poor farmers to tap into the growing international demand for hibiscus. Some 60,000 people in Darfur have benefited and 12,000 have received direct support for traditional hibiscus harvesting and processing. UNDP has supported the launch of the Regional Stabilization Facility in the Lake Chad basin as a rapid response mechanism to help local authorities in their efforts to contain Boko Haram, improve community safety and security, restore infrastructure and basic services and provide livelihood opportunities.

72. UN-Habitat has assessed and identified urban recovery needs in Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen and completed more than 70 profiles. The Global Land Tool Network and UN-Habitat, working with a core group of United Nations agencies, have developed a guidance note on the United Nations and land and conflict. UN-Habitat has spearheaded the inter-agency development of a United Nations system-wide strategy on sustainable urbanization, which is now a blueprint for sustainable urban development. UNICEF has continued to support Governments in shock-responsive and adaptive social protection. It has provided Governments in eight countries with technical and financial support to scale up social transfers, thereby benefiting 8.5 million children in 2.8 million households.

73. WFP has, through 67 operations, supported school children with nutritious meals, snacks or take-home rations to provide an essential safety net. About 9.6 million people in 50 countries have benefited from assets creation, related training and other livelihood-support programmes. By the end of 2019, WFP had distributed a record \$2.1 billion in cash and 4.2 million metric tons of food valued at \$3.5 billion. It launched its fastest-ever scale-up of food assistance in Yemen and, in the Syrian Arab Republic, provided life-saving food and nutrition assistance to 6.3 million people. In Mozambique, it was among the first on the ground after two of the country's most powerful cyclones, using helicopters to provide immediate food assistance to 20,000 survivors in hard-to-reach areas. In the end, the operation reached more than 1.8 million people affected by Cyclone Idai and more than 300,000 affected by Cyclone Kenneth.

74. A United Nations crisis management team, managed by WHO, has been triggered in response to COVID-19 and continues to work across the United Nations system. WHO has supplied personal protective equipment, helped to strengthen laboratory capacity at the national level and provided public information and online courses. It has also developed a strategic preparedness and response plan, outlining the public health measures that the international community stands ready to provide, prepared draft operational planning guidance for United Nations country teams and

conducted the Solidarity clinical trial, which is designed to generate the robust data required for the most effective treatments for COVID-19.

VIII. Conclusion and recommendations

75. To accelerate global action for a world without poverty, Member States and the international community may wish to consider the following recommendations:

(a) Countries should prioritize ending poverty in all its forms and dimensions, with a renewed focus on leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first, including women and children, persons with disabilities, older persons, indigenous peoples, homeless people and slum-dwellers. Sufficient resources should be allocated to reach that goal, including by mobilizing domestic resources and by meeting official development assistance commitments;

(b) Countries should expand and strengthen social protection systems, including floors, to ensure comprehensive and adequate social protection for all and thereby reduce poverty and inequality. They should consider building provisions for public health emergencies into those systems;

(c) Countries should accord the highest priority to increasing access to good quality education and skills training, particularly for women, young people, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, in order to address the immense equity gaps exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic and to build human capital;

(d) Countries should invest in universal health-care coverage for improved health and as a bulwark against epidemics and public health emergencies that can have a catastrophic impact on progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals;

(e) Developing countries and their partners need to prioritize investing in statistical systems and new technologies in order to fill data gaps, which is vital for the implementation of the Third Decade and the decade of action, and for building back better after COVID-19;

(f) Countries should reset socioeconomic policies for a better recovery after COVID-19. There is a need to reallocate public resources through broad-based fiscal stimulus measures with a view to promoting investment in universal health care, education and social protection, keeping micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises afloat and accelerating inclusive growth in the 10 years that remain to accomplish the decade of action;

(g) Countries should seize the opportunity offered by COVID-19 to shift to greener and more inclusive economies;

(h) The international community should take multilateral action to address the global impact of COVID-19 and future pandemics. Adequate financing instruments for responding to crises should be put in place before crises occur and incentives for risk reduction should be built into them;

(i) The United Nations system should prioritize the joint formulation and implementation of poverty eradication strategies in the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and continue to support the strengthening of national institutions with a view to enhancing policy coherence and multisectoral coordination and thereby eradicate poverty and hunger.