

## **Strengthening ECOSOC, Evolving HLPF, and Delivering the 2030 Agenda: The Sustainable Development Journey to COVID-19 Recovery**

### ***Business and Industry Major Group Recommendations***

---

#### **Executive Summary**

The unfolding pandemic crisis has challenged national governments, the international community and the private sector in fundamental ways. All attention is now turned to meeting urgent health and economic needs of people. Launching a global COVID-19 response is now an imperative and overarching focus for the United Nations, as it is for global business.

Key requirements to address the immediate impact of the COVID-19 crisis include support for:

- Business continuity, through flexible and non-bureaucratic access to low-cost short- and medium-term loans to overcome liquidity challenges
- Employers and employment, through reduced employment taxes or social security charges and extended temporary unemployment programs
- Proper access to income support and social protection
- Preventing or minimizing the disruption of supply chains, which are critically important for the economy and employment

But even as the global community, business and other stakeholders mobilize to defeat COVID-19, we must not lose sight of implementing the 2030 Agenda commitments and efforts—indeed, in most cases they are necessary to build more resilient economies and societies. The 2030 Agenda is a road-map for truly effective responses to alleviate the economic, employment and social impact of the crisis, to develop and deploy new healthcare solutions, and to lay foundations for a recovery that will reflect lessons learned from this pandemic and put us on track to sustainable development that leaves no one behind.

A basic requirement for harnessing the full potential of the private sector during this crisis is to promote enabling frameworks for business, by effectively and regularly assessing the impact of regulation on businesses and job creation. This includes easing the burden of registration and compliance for independent contractors and self-employed persons, improving access to credit and ensuring enterprise registration requirements do not act as an unnecessary barrier to innovation and employment. In addition, creating innovation-friendly framework conditions, in which start-ups can generate new ideas and inventions through sufficient R&D spending will help re-animate SMEs and entrepreneurs hit hard by the crisis' economic disruption.

Business as usual is now obsolete for the private sector, as well as for the international community. **It is in the DNA of business to turn challenges into opportunities and to innovate and develop practical and realistic solutions for the problems we face, and we are ready to join forces with governments and the multilateral community to respond forcefully to the crisis.**

Now is the time to be bold and innovative in the linked deliberations to deliver the 2030 Agenda by strengthening ECOSOC and taking the HLPF forward. Business and Industry calls on the UN to seize these linked opportunities to address both ongoing commitments and new challenges on economic, social and environmental fronts, working more closely than ever before with business.

We call on the UN community to crowd in experts and “do-ers” from the private sector, and to mobilize countries and other stakeholders to rebuild better and stronger throughout their COVID-19 recovery by working within the framework of the 2030 Agenda. Member states have stated the need for business to actively engage, and both the GSDR and the SG’s recent report on Economic and Social Impacts of the COVID-19 crisis have highlighted the crucial role of business.

## **Recommendations**

The Business and Industry Group is actively advancing sustainable development through voluntary initiatives, sectoral and thematic groups and via a wide range of multi-stakeholder partnerships. It will be key to enhance national implementation, mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda into national planning, policies, strategies and financial frameworks, while respecting national processes and ensuring shared “ownership.”

The potential of the private sector to work with the international community in building a prosperous and sustainable global economy and to address common sustainability challenges has not been fully realized. As several UN assessments have shown, the United Nations needs to improve the way it engages with representative business and with the private sector.

The proper implementation of the UN reform in the field is absolutely key. UN Resident Coordinators need to closely align with representative business and employers’ federations, local Global Compact Networks and other business initiatives and networks in the planning and implementation of Cooperation Frameworks and Agreements.

We urge governments to support and provide new interfaces and opportunities for the UN system, governments, businesses and other stakeholders to work together. These new options should reflect and advance: ***Impact, Integrity and Inclusiveness***.

- **Thematic Focus for Action:** The UN Decade of Action and Delivery should prioritize the essential enablers for action across the SDGs. For business, those fundamental enablers have to do with advancing human well-being and building human capacity, eradicating poverty, access to quality basic services, such as health, education, water, energy, sanitation, among others.

The Decade of Action should approach recovery from the triple shock of the COVID-19 crisis to healthcare, jobs, food security and economic activity on the foundation of basic good governance and rule of law. The GSDR identifies governance as the first “lever” for transformation and for good reason. At the national level, legal and government policy frameworks do not yet adequately integrate the SDGs. More collaborative structures at national and global level to share expertise, engage in dialogue and launch partnerships will be needed, and ECOSOC and HLPF should continue to build in meaningful opportunities for business and other stakeholders to observe and be part of the deliberations.

The ability of governments to deliver on the SDGs will be severely hampered until solutions to the Covid-19 crisis are underway. First and foremost, people who have lost their livelihoods have to be able to return to employment, and here the business community is on the front lines.

**With that in mind, business and industry believes the focus of ECOSOC, FfD and HLPF should be to catalyze global resource flows of technology and funding towards economic empowerment and growth, longer-term sustainability pathways and the co-creation of integrated solutions through cooperation and partnerships at all levels.** Particular attention should be dedicated to re-establishing livelihoods, strengthening healthcare preparedness and access; boosting infrastructure services like access to clean water, electricity, and connectivity with an emphasis on building in economic and social resilience.

- **Responding to the pandemic without losing sight of the SDGs:** The know-how, expertise, and resources of business and industry are valuable to inform discussions on further implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in light of the pandemic and its fallout. To ensure a more robust impact, a new institutional infrastructure is required to crowd in business know-how, partnership and resources in all meetings related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

Roles and responsibilities with clear deliverables need to be defined, not only at the national level and in working with private sector partners, but also in the UN. We ask member states to advance institutional infrastructure and resources for meaningful and inclusive business engagement in the Decade of Delivery. The business and industry communities are ready to step in and work together for sustainable and meaningful steps forward towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda.

#### **Revise HLPF governance and create institutional infrastructure for meaningful and practical business engagement**

- ***Increase trust, transparency and dialogue with the private sector at every step of the HLPF cycle:*** Policy assessment and dialogue at the UN, regional and national level needs to invite and integrate business views on a more systematic basis. The private sector brings important expertise and knowledge on actions, measures and policies needed to implement the 2030 Agenda. The Business and Industry Major Group is ready to step up its engagement with UN DESA, UN Member States, Civil Society and all other Stakeholders to move the implementation of the SDGs forward.
- ***Strengthen peer review and shared learning through improved Voluntary National Reviews (VNR):*** The Covid-19 pandemic should be an additional impetus to step up updates to the VNRs. The VNR process at national and international levels should be more inclusive, engaging and enabling greater recognized substantive input from business and civil society. It should also become more rigorous, using flexible yet comparable reporting formats, frameworks and metrics to identify challenges and gaps across goals. Lastly, VNRs need to be more action-oriented and provide concrete recommendations that can be monitored and evaluated.
- ***Improve monitoring of progress through better data:*** More quality data are needed to monitor progress on SDG targets. An up-to-date and open database on the SDGs would be an important step to make this information easily accessible and actionable, and to track progress.
- ***Pursue more determined follow-up to the HLPF at the national level, including in the framing and development of the VNRs:*** The SDG actions take place at national and local levels. The HLPF and VNR processes are not ends in themselves, they serve as a means to peer learning that triggers change on the ground. In this regard, business sees potential to

connect Resident Coordinators (RCs) with local business groups, chambers and employer federations.

UN DESA should consider implementation of a consultation process to identify measures to strengthen information, discussion and monitoring/tracking on follow-up activities related to VNRs.

***Build connections between the RCs and national employers and chamber organizations to advance implementation and build capacity***

RCs will be important catalysts for mobilizing domestic resources by government and private sector players toward linked SDG + COVID- 19 policy development and actions. They are also well-placed to serve as a bridge between global efforts and businesses on the group. We encourage the UN to invite RCs to make those connections, and we are available to assist where needed to identify the appropriate contacts country by country.

**Unleash the potential of partnerships with the private sector, with an emphasis on COVID-19 response and recovery, consistent with the SDGs**

As reflected in SDG 17 and throughout the 2030 Agenda, partnerships with the private sector are key to reaching the SDGs. In its next phase of work, ECOSOC and HLPF should mainstream collaborative approaches between the UN, governments, civil society, and business throughout the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Businesses and the UN will have to continue to think beyond corporate social responsibility to ingrain and animate collaborative efforts in other areas, whether in COVID-19 response and recovery, or in broader areas such as infrastructure, capacity-building, education and connectivity.

The UN should launch an ongoing dialogue with business about how to incent and scale up SDG partnerships with business, to create measurable shared value towards the SDGs for all involved.

**Catalyze resource mobilization and synergies across COVID-19 response, stimulus and response, and prioritize the right enabling conditions to deploy private sector resources, solutions and know-how, making full use of multilateral trade and investment as well as domestic resources mobilization**

Inadequate financial resources from public and private sources are a major obstacle to achieving the 2030 Agenda commitments and pledges. While domestic resource mobilization continues to be a core pillar in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda to help close this gap, donors from public and private sector entities will need to step in to address increased needs arising from the pandemic.

However, even with a robust plan incorporating financing for development, there is still a risk of not reaching a key target of SDG 16, which is to significantly reduce IFFs (illicit financial flows). The transnational nature of this issue requires the public and private sector to collaborate and integrate globally-led initiatives, supported by enabling frameworks on political and economic fronts, including strong rule of law, combatting bribery and corruption, and democratic and transparent governance.