



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

Sixtieth Session of the Commission for Social Development

Ministerial Forum

"Strengthening multilateralism to deliver well-being and dignity for all by addressing food insecurity and the eradication of poverty, including through the promotion of sustainable food systems"

Tuesday, 8 February 2022, 10:00am-12:00pm
(Virtual meeting)

Chair's Summary

The Commission held a Ministerial Forum on the theme of *"Strengthening multilateralism to deliver well-being and dignity for all by addressing food insecurity and the eradication of poverty, including through the promotion of sustainable food systems"* on 8 February 2022. The forum was opened and moderated by the Chair of the sixtieth session of the Commission, **H.E. Maria del Carmen Squeff**. Panellists included **H.E. Mrs. Dina Boluarte**, Vice-President and Minister of Development and Social Inclusion of Peru, **H.E. Ms. Hanna Sarkkinen**, Minister of Social Affairs and Health of Finland, **H. E. Mr. Sahil Babayev**, Minister of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan, **H.E. Ms. Williametta E. Saydee-Tarr**, Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection of Liberia, **H.E. Ms. Mariam bint Ali bin Nasser Al-Misnad**, Minister of Social Development and the Family of the State of Qatar, **H.E. Ms. Ariunzaya Ayush**, Minister for Labour and Social Protection of Mongolia, and **H.E. Mr. Kentaro Uesugi**, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Ministers shared their national experiences in addressing food insecurity and eradicating poverty, including promoting sustainable food systems. They also discussed how to strengthen multilateralism to promote well-being and dignity for all in their efforts to recover better to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the decade of action.

Policies and measures put in place to counter the impacts of COVID-19, improve food security and eradicate poverty

Nearly all countries used social protection measures to respond to worsening poverty and deepening food insecurity brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Panellists presented concrete policies and strategies that have proven successful in this regard.

Many countries responded to the onset of COVID-19 by instituting emergency measures that prevented the worst impacts of the pandemic from materializing, often focusing on vulnerable and marginalized populations. Several temporary strategies to combat COVID-19 in **Peru** had a geographic focus, as social exclusion exhibits a strong rural dimension. Time-bound measures were introduced to support rural households, infants, and high-risk older persons and persons with disabilities (AMACHAY). The effects of COVID-19 also reached urban populations, where poverty indicators increased significantly among young people and working-age adults.

Azerbaijan also stressed the link between eradicating poverty and providing social protection for vulnerable groups, including older persons and persons with disabilities. Through social reform packages, **Azerbaijan** expanded social protection coverage to 2.1 million people, increased social transfers by 65 per cent and more than doubled the minimum wage. Similarly, through the Social Safety Nets Project, **Liberia** increased the beneficiary pool to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, expanding coverage to an additional 50,000 households, and continues to grow the programme. Food assistance was also provided to 2.5 million vulnerable persons. **Liberia** noted that the country is shifting to focus on establishing basic building blocks for a national social protection system.

In **Qatar**, measures were undertaken to prevent and confront the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, while maintaining the continuity of the provision of basic services, particularly in education, healthcare, comprehensive social protection systems and justice for all. **Qatar** assisted the private sector to continue to pay wages, combating poverty and financial bankruptcy. Given the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on older persons, targeted measures were introduced to facilitate their access to healthcare services, social protection, medicine and long-term care facilities. State policies that focused on strengthening the role of the family in providing care and protection to its members proved to be effective in the crisis.

Mongolia undertook steps to gradually increase social welfare benefits to support poor and vulnerable households, individuals and organizations. Despite progress, challenges persisted due to the need for intersectoral communication and coordinated action to eliminate poverty in all its dimensions. **Mongolia**'s national statistical office is developing a national multidimensional poverty index, which would enable the identification of those living in poverty not only by income but also by other dimensions such as education, living conditions and health status.

Developing nationally adequate social protection systems for all, including floors, beyond COVID-19

Panellists stressed how the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of social policy, particularly social protection systems, to weather shocks and crises. The pandemic has exposed significant gaps in social protection coverage, comprehensiveness and adequacy, yet at the same time has demonstrated the ability of social protection systems to prevent and tackle poverty, hunger and inequality across the life cycle. Recovery from COVID-19 provides a policy window for countries to address the significant gaps in social protection coverage by building on emergency

measures to make progress towards universal, adequate, comprehensive and sustainable social protection systems. Investments in health, social protection, skills and gender equality are key to resilience and social stability now and in the future.

Societies should promote preparedness and resilience during stable periods to successfully respond to risks and crises when they arise. As **Finland** had a comprehensive, agile and sustainable social protection system before the pandemic, the government only made basic adjustments to the existing universal system to respond to the impacts of COVID-19, including addressing the rise in food insecurity. Moreover, as demonstrated during COVID-19, housing is crucial during a crisis, and addressing homelessness is an essential part of the social protection system in Finland.

The digitalization of many government services, including social protection and employment, improved the provision of such services in **Azerbaijan**, allowing for an agile response to COVID-19. For example, the electronic subsistence programme maintained a digital registry of the unemployed, underemployed and job seekers. Digital unemployment services allowed for a rapid scale-up following the onset of the pandemic, and as a result, employment-support measures reached about half of the national population (4.8 million people).

Strengthening food systems to improve food security and promote more nutritious and healthy diets for all

Food systems should be efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable, providing nutritious and affordable food for all. In **Liberia**, the government held a national agricultural fair to highlight the country's agricultural productivity. The number of commercial farms and agribusinesses significantly increased - a positive development in efforts to mechanize farm production. Increased acreages for bumper crops reached rural and urban markets due to the improvements in the logistics and supportive infrastructure provided by the Ministry. Food processing and warehousing also increased to meet the production growth.

Nutrition is fundamental for the well-being and dignity of all. Ensuring broad access to sufficient food and a healthy diet all year round includes supporting food-security and nutrition-specific programmes such as lean season assistance or in-kind food aid. Many countries stepped up their efforts in this regard as part of their pandemic emergency responses. Both **Peru** and **Brazil** distributed food baskets to many households.

Many children worldwide suffer from malnutrition due to hunger and poverty, and the situation worsens as the COVID-19 pandemic persists. Several panellists highlighted school feeding programmes' vital role in improving food security and promoting more nutritious and healthy diets for children. **Finland** noted its participation in the Global School Meals Coalition, which aims to give every child the opportunity to receive a healthy meal by 2030. It encouraged other Member States to join the Coalition. In **Peru**, the school feeding programme *Qali Warma* served more than 4 million students in more than 64 million public education institutions. Nutrition support provided by local governments is also crucial in **Peru**, with 230 municipalities receiving training in managing nutrition support. Citizen initiatives, such as community kitchens, also play a key role in improving food security and healthy nutrition.

Mongolia set objectives in mid-, and long-term development policy documents to stabilize food supply and access, improve nutrition and ensure the safety of raw materials and products at all stages of the food chain. **Mongolia** also undertook substantive monitoring policy measures, such as providing long-term rates for domestic financing of producers and maintaining the interest rates of the central bank in order to prevent food shortages and rising food prices. As a result of the measures taken by the government, agricultural production increased in some types of products, and domestic production of main food products increased by 9 per cent compared to the previous year.

Promoting gender equality for the eradication of poverty and addressing food insecurity

Women are often more affected by poverty and food insecurity, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. **Liberia** shared that the country's Gender Equality Profile provided an in-depth analysis of the understanding of the differences in the conditions, needs, participation rates, access to resources and property rights, development planning and control of assets, decision-making powers between girls, women, boys and men in their assigned gender roles. To ensure gender mainstreaming and social inclusion efforts into sectors' plans, programmes, and policies as well as to institutionalize the Gender Responsive Budgeting process, there has been a transition from the Gender Desk or Gender Focal Person (GFP) to Gender and Social Inclusion Units (GSIU). Recent reforms to family leave policies aim to encourage more gender equality in care responsibilities in **Finland**. The Minister also underlined the role that sexual and reproductive health and rights play in contributing to the well-being of individuals, families and the whole of society.

Strengthening multilateralism to support national efforts to address food insecurity and eradicate poverty

The need to strengthen international solidarity, multilateral cooperation, and genuine partnerships among all stakeholders was deemed crucial by all speakers. Participants strongly endorsed the critical role of multilateralism in the path to recovery from COVID-19 and the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The **European Union** emphasized that enhanced multilateral cooperation is more necessary than ever to face global crises.

To achieve sustainable food systems, broad multilateral cooperation is needed. Along these lines, the **Qatar** Fund for Development and FAO signed an agreement to assist Somalia in improving resilience to climate change. The agreement aims to support small farms and livestock production by developing proactive strategies to adapt to the effects of climate change. The **Qatar** Fund for Development also signed a contribution agreement with the Adaptation Fund established under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to finance adaptation to climate change in countries experiencing the most vulnerability in this regard, including least developed countries and SIDS.

Panellists noted the usefulness of various international fora in supporting national action to improve food security and nutrition. **Peru** underlined participation in the ministerial forums of the Commission for Social Development, as well as the FAO Committee on Food Security, the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit, together with the Scaling Up Nutrition movement, as international

fora that provided critical references for the country's policies on food security. **Japan** hosted the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021. The outcome document from the Summit, the Tokyo Compact on Global Nutrition for Growth, provides direction for the international community to improve nutrition. At the Summit, various stakeholders, including governments, announced more than USD 27 billion of nutrition-related funding which includes Japan's assistance of more than USD 2.8 billion. Along with bilateral food assistance, **Japan**, through the World Food Programme, contributes to emergency food assistance, school meals, and programmes to encourage the development of farmland.

Panellists emphasized the importance of international cooperation, particularly South-South cooperation, in eradicating poverty and improving food security, stressing the importance of coordination and an integrated approach among different entities of the United Nations system at the national level through the Resident Coordinator system. All panellists appreciated the value of an integrated approach among the various relevant United Nations entities (ECOSOC, FAO, IFAD, ILO and WFP) to address these challenges in a coordinated manner. An interactive dialogue between the relevant ministries and the entities of the United Nations system at the national level could better align goals between different actors. Panellists noted the value of sharing best practices between countries, as well as the importance of civil society organizations nationally and globally as they can reach the most vulnerable and have the best knowledge of the situation in the field.

Finland noted the need to strengthen political and financial support to the United Nations system, including strengthening the role of the Commission for Social Development in addressing the social dimensions of sustainable development. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of strong international organizations such as the WHO; now Member States have a better understanding of the United Nations system's needs.