



**United Nations**

Department of  
Economic and  
Social Affairs

## **Sixtieth Session of the Commission for Social Development**

### **High-level Panel Discussion on the Priority Theme**

**“Inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 for sustainable livelihoods, well-being and dignity for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda”**

**Monday, 7 February 2022, 3:00 – 5:00pm**  
(Virtual meeting)

### **Chair’s Summary**

The Commission for Social Development held a high-level panel discussion on the priority theme, **“Inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 for sustainable livelihoods, well-being and dignity for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda”** on 7 February 2022. **H.E. Ms. Maria del Carmen Squeff**, the Chair of the 60<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission, opened and moderated the panel. **Mr. Qu Dongyu**, Director-General of the FAO, was a keynote speaker. The panelists were **H.E. María Juliana Ruiz Sandoval**, First Lady of Colombia; **H.E. Matías Lestani**, Vice-Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries of Argentina; **Mr. Abdullah Hadda**, Director of Programming and Social Development, Ministry of National Solidarity, the Family and the Status of Women of Algeria; **Ms. Mikiko Otani**, Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child; and **Ms. Maryann Broxton**, Co-Director of the Multidimensional Aspects of Poverty Research, ATD Fourth World, United States.

### **The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on poverty, food security, and inequalities**

Progress in reducing poverty has slid back and hunger has increased worldwide. Many of the drivers of poverty and hunger were already in place before the pandemic. Low- and middle-income countries that were affected by multiple drivers, faced the highest levels of food insecurity and malnutrition. The world was not on track to put an end to poverty (SDG1), hunger, and malnutrition (SDG2) by 2030. Since 2009, the frequency and intensity of the impacts of climate change, conflicts, and economic slowdowns have increased and negatively impacted poverty and hunger. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed our vulnerability. It has exacerbated inequalities, threatened food security, caused economic disruption, and created havoc in the life of millions.

COVID-19 disproportionately affects the vulnerable segments of a society in terms of employment, access to services, and opportunities, leading to higher levels of financial insecurity and greater

risk of poverty, food insecurity and income inequality. Informal workers have been among the hardest hit. The employment outcomes of young people are substantially worse than that of adults. Disadvantaged and marginalized groups continue to experience discrimination and may face barriers in finding fair and stable jobs, which may increase the risk of poverty, social exclusion, and homelessness. Achieving full and productive employment and decent work for persons with disabilities has become more urgent due to the crisis. A question that arose is how we can best address poverty, social exclusion, and homelessness.

Although world agri-food systems proved to be resilient and adaptable during COVID-19, the pandemic has complicated the task of ending hunger and malnutrition. Between 720 and 811 million people faced hunger in 2020, as many as 161 million more than in 2019. Income inequality, made worse by the pandemic, further increased the risk of food insecurity. About three billion people around the world cannot afford a healthy diet. An additional 1 billion people are at risk of not being able to afford a healthy diet if a further shock were to reduce their incomes by one-third. The increase in demand for food, urbanization, new consumption patterns, the threat of climate change are issues that have become more salient during the pandemic.

### **Emergency measures implemented to mitigate the worst effects of COVID-19**

Emergency measures taken during COVID-19 have helped to prevent the worst effect of the pandemic on poverty, hunger, and food insecurity. Measures include avoiding trade restrictions, introducing fiscal packages to support small- and medium-sized producers in the agricultural sectors, scaling up social protection schemes (including cash transfers, large-scale food distribution, and voucher schemes, rural development services to family farmers, adaptation of school feeding programmes). In 2020, **Algeria** launched a social protection program that aims to reduce disparities, including in rural and remote areas. 5,000 activities have been put in place and 5,500 jobs have been created to support the implementation of this program. Algeria has taken measures to provide financial support to businesses during the crisis as well as assist informal workers and support their formalization. **Colombia** is increasingly taking a multisectoral approach to foster sustainability, welfare, and dignity. It has put food security at the heart of its development plan; food baskets have supported 4 million people. Colombia has launched a major national alliance for nutrition and food security. The plan against malnutrition succeeded in bringing about a 39 per cent drop in the number of children under 5 years who died due to malnutrition in 2020, compared to 2018. **Brazil** set up an income transfer program in 2020, supporting over 130 million people directly and indirectly. It transitioned from the “Bolsa Familia” to the new “Brazilian aid” program in November 2021, which has simplified benefits and increased support to children, youth, and families in extreme poverty. The government created new Brazilian Gas Aid, which supported 5 million families in January 2022.

### **Lessons learned and innovative solutions**

This is a critical time to search for solutions that are innovative, creative, and build on lessons learned. There is a need to recognize, share, scale up and build on successful measures taken during the crisis. An inclusive, resilient, and fair recovery can help build a better world, in line with the 2030 Agenda. The decade of action is the opportunity for the international community to redouble efforts to implement the SDGs. Universal policy to ensure equal access to basic services and basic infrastructure, in particular education, healthcare, and affordable internet, as well as social

protection and decent employment, is essential to reduce poverty and inequalities. Rebuilding from the pandemic will require increased and targeted investments in rural development as 80% of the world's extreme poor live in rural areas.

Investments in the agri-food sector are essential to reducing poverty and achieving the 2030 agenda. Agri-food systems - central to the livelihoods of 4.5 billion people worldwide - should be strengthened to be more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable so as to provide affordable and healthy diets for all. Measures aimed at creating off-farm jobs as well as fostering entrepreneurship and economic diversification are equally important. There is a need to boost public and private investments and financing services, increase access to infrastructure and financial resources for farmers, and implement policy reforms that provide incentives for the private sector to support agri-food systems and rural development. Further, there is a need to increase the productivity of family farmers and small-scale food producers through investments in human capital, social protection systems, and rural infrastructure.

Innovations and new technologies are key to sustainably increasing the production of food. For instance, **Argentina** has been working on a robust system of STI to provide high-quality food in a sustainable manner. Its use of biotechnology, direct seeding, precision agriculture, organic production, animal welfare, and satellite technology aims to adapt to climate change and bring about sustainable production. Argentina is implementing a gamut of policies, notably, a bill to enhance the agro-bio industry sector to increase sustainable food production and strengthen social inclusion; the “In Our Hands” program seeks to improve production conditions and add value, including for women, family, and indigenous agriculture, and artisanal fishery; the “Argentinian action against hunger” (supported by the FAO); the “Livestock plan for Argentina 2022-2023” provides credit lines to stimulate sustainable livestock breeding; and “Credit to stimulate production and reduce export duties”.

### **Children and youth are central to a post-COVID-19 recovery**

COVID-19 has impacted the well-being and development of children and underscored the need for vigorous international cooperation and the mainstreaming of children's rights. Countries should continue to prioritize education in national budgets and strategies and address the long-term impact of school closures on children. While online education has been used as an alternative to in-person learning during the pandemic, lack of access to the internet, digital equipment, and support have exacerbated existing inequalities and left many children behind, including children in developing countries, children in remote areas, from poor families, and children with disabilities. These children are at increased risk of child marriage, child labour, trafficking, and recruitment by armed groups, leading to their permanent dropout from education. Supporting remote learning and ensuring a safe return to school requires financial, human, and technical resources, which are often lacking in developing countries.

Children and young people are agents of change and need to be heard on matters that affect them. We need to integrate and involve young people and children in all discussions on development policies. The Committee on the rights of the child under the Convention on the Rights of the Child is seeking to give space to children in discussions and consultations events by inviting them as equal partners. Several suggestions were put forward on strengthening the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, aligning its national recommendations with assistance by UN agencies

and bilateral assistance, calling for the mainstreaming of children's rights to be a clear UN policy, and welcoming the Secretary-General's decision to develop a Guidance Note on mainstreaming children's rights, and supporting access of children and young people to gain consultative status within ECOSOC through financial and technical support.

### **International cooperation and solidarity for an equitable economic recovery**

International cooperation and solidarity, based on joint responsibility and mutual trust, are essential to ensure an equitable and resilient recovery. Multilateralism, including South-South and triangular cooperation, needs to be strengthened to unite forces to achieve the SDGs. To help developing countries (which have used many of their resources to combat the pandemic) achieve an inclusive and equitable recovery from COVID-19, it is essential to ensure equal access to vaccines for all.

Countries need to learn the lessons from the pandemic and identify ways in which they can move together towards a better world. Countries reaffirmed their readiness to exchange effective policies and measures to eradicate poverty and hunger. FAO is hosting the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, which will support countries through technical and policy support in further developing and implementing national pathways towards agri-food systems transformation.

### **Ensuring that people live in dignity**

**Mr. Qu Dongyu** suggested to learn from the past two years and to design and implement ambitious action plans to deliver sustainable livelihoods, well-being and dignity for all.

Ms. Broxton stated that people have the “right to be treated with dignity”, but this too often is overlooked. Countries and stakeholders must work together to develop an agreed-upon concept of human dignity, including in UN documents and resolutions. People directly impacted by the experience of poverty should be at the heart of this process. According to the panelist, dignity means “rights for all, with no discrimination of any kind, regardless of socio-economic status or legal recognition as a person”. Dignity means “acknowledging each person's voice, personal agency, determination over their own destiny, and equitable inclusion and participation”. Dignity needs to be the lens of measurement in the field of public policy. For example, examining SDG2 on zero hunger through the lens of dignity means more than ensuring sustenance. A dignity lens sees food as cultural, having religious, social, and community ties, and as central to enjoyment, remembrance, and tradition.

Inequities are never inevitable. They are the direct result of policy, institutional practices, and power imbalances. Policy, practices, and goals based on partial knowledge cannot be fully effective. Too often, social policies take a macro-overview of an issue and, in doing so, miss the personal aspect and the real lived experience. People who live in poverty are excluded from the conversation. A dignity lens allows for a shift beyond the macro to the personal; it allows to move beyond a monetary measure of poverty to a multi-dimensional one. Dignity eliminates the deserving/undeserving mentality, the belief that certain people or groups are less worth than others, and not looking at the systems that perpetuate inequalities themselves. A dignity lens demands the

equitable participation and full inclusion of people directly impacted by poverty. They are no longer seen only as recipients of charity but as equals in decision-making processes, rejecting the shame, stigma, and discrimination of poverty.