



Will 2021 be our year?

From political views to classifying favourite holiday movies, our world is bitterly divided. But if there is one thing we all seem to agree on, it is that the year 2020 has been an *annus horribilis*.

The COVID-19 pandemic unleashed a health and economic crisis unprecedented in scope and magnitude. National lockdowns enforced in March and April paralyzed economic activity across the board, leaving millions of workers worldwide without jobs and wiping out nearly all the output gains of the previous four years.

A re-opening in July and August has led to a second surge of infections, especially in Europe and the United States.

While the world economy ends 2020 in better shape than many experts predicted, the long-term effects of the pandemic will continue impacting it in the future. Despite a temporary boost from fiscal stimulus measures, rising levels of poverty, inequality and debt, falling trade and investments and low productivity continue throwing roadblocks in the way of a robust economic rebound.

As the first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine are rolled out this month, we are ending 2020 on a hopeful note. But will the world economy receive a similar booster shot? At the recently concluded Climate Ambition Summit, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged the world leaders to rebuild a global economy that is fairer and more sustainable. "The recovery from COVID-19 presents an opportunity to set our economies and societies on a green path in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," he said.

Will we seize the opportunity to recover better? Will 2021 be a turning point for people and planet? Find out on 26 January, as we launch our flagship report, the World Economic Situation and Prospects 2021. Watch this space.

The report will be available here on 26 January: <http://www.bit.ly/wespreport>

HIGHLIGHTS



More than a game – recovering better with sports

Sport is all about participation. It has the power of bringing together individuals, communities and countries, often bridging cultural, ethnic and national divides. But as COVID-19 has ravaged through our world, it has taken a heavy toll on both professional and recreational sports.

As the pandemic hit, many sporting events were postponed or cancelled to protect athletes and audiences alike. It was only months into the crisis that players were able to return to arenas, thanks to much innovation and collaboration. In most cases, fans were still absent, and the come-back had varying consequences for the athletes and their families.

“The world of sport was among those sectors most visibly affected — hard and early,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres said in a new advocacy brief, ‘Recovering Better: Sport for Development and Peace Reopening, Recovery and Resilience Post-COVID-19’, launched by the United Nations on 15 December 2020.

Co-led by UN DESA and UN-Women, the new brief was collaboratively drafted by sport focal points in a large number of UN entities including the World Health Organization, UN Office for Drugs and Crime, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, International Labour Organization, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Children’s Fund, UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, UN Climate Change, UN Environment Programme and the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism.

The brief sets out a vision to support the reopening, recovery and resilience of sport, calling for team spirit among nations, organizations and social groups to achieve the global goals. It also presents critical actions to be addressed across four key areas – promoting human rights and combatting discrimination; ensuring equal access to sport and physical activity; safeguarding participants; and ensuring integrity in sport.

“Already a pioneer and promoter of inclusive and sustainable development in an unstable and unequal world, the sporting world must now redefine and redesign itself, not only to improve its resilience to future shocks, but to broaden its contribution to the world’s efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals,” Mr. Guterres said.

Learn more about the role of sports for peace and development in the new brief 'Recovering Better: Sport for Development and Peace Reopening, Recovery and Resilience Post-COVID-19'

HIGHLIGHTS



Forests are essential for a green recovery from COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken an unprecedented toll on lives and economies around the world. As countries continue to work to turn the tide of the pandemic, plans and measures are being put in place to set us on the path to a green recovery. Forests have a key role to play in these efforts.

“Forests offer nature-friendly solutions for a green recovery from the pandemic,” said Alexander Trepelkov, Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat in UN DESA. “Investing in forests is a critical component in building sustainable, resilient and fair societies, capable of withstanding future pandemics and global challenges like climate change and biodiversity loss,” he added.

Forests provide a wide spectrum of benefits and services, supporting the health and livelihoods of millions of people. For the rural poor, forests are a critical source of food, fuel, income and well-being. “Historically, forests have provided a safety net in times of crisis, and we are seeing this to be the case during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Mr. Trepelkov. “Forests are a lifeline for some of our most vulnerable populations, including those living in rural areas, indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities,” he added.

It is in our best interests to safeguard forests. If current rates of deforestation and forest degradation continue unabated, it could lead to more zoonotic diseases, like COVID-19, in the future. Healthy, well-managed forests, on the other hand, are the foundation for long-term sustainability in addressing water scarcity, mitigating climate change and ensuring energy and food security.

The UN Forum on Forests Secretariat in UN DESA is working to support our path to recovery by providing analytical products to inform decision-making. In 2020, the Secretariat produced [two policy briefs](#) highlighting how forests can contribute to sustainable recovery from the pandemic. Currently, the Secretariat is undertaking an initial assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sustainable forest management, including the impacts on the forest sector, and forest-dependent people, indigenous peoples and local communities. As part of this assessment, an [expert group meeting](#) will be held on 19-21 January 2021.

Photo: Mariana Latii (UN DESA's International Forest Photo Contest)



Calling all world-changers: Share your SDG Good Practices!

UN DESA is calling on all changemakers, trailblazers and fearless activists to share their stories with the world. We are looking for good practices, success stories and lessons learned that could help others take action for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Five years since world leaders pledged to achieve prosperity for all on a clean planet, the SDGs seem as distant as

ever, as the deadly COVID-19 pandemic forced the world to a halt, undoing years, sometimes even decades of progress.

Even in this grim new reality, the SDG changemakers around the world are refusing to throw in the towel. On the contrary, they are redoubling their efforts to make up for the lost time. From creating green energy jobs for women and youth in war-torn Yemen to training community veterinarians in South Sudan, to helping indigenous peoples monitor the fulfilment of their rights in Latin America, the world is bubbling with [inspiring SDG action](#) – now we want to hear about yours! It's time to register your good practice for the SDGs.

What makes a good practice good? In order to be approved, an SDG good practice should be:

- SDG-specific
- Results-focused
- Inclusive
- Accountable, sustainable and replicable

If the good practice is found to fulfill these criteria, it will join the ranks of [over 500 projects](#) from every corner of the world, already featured in UN DESA's database. SDG good practice– no matter how large or small – may be taken up by someone on the other end of the planet. It may inspire organizations just like yours to start working for the global goals.

But most importantly, it will show the world that despite the COVID-19 setbacks, the wave of SDG action is unstoppable.

Here are the next steps:

- Register SDG good practice before 28th February 2021 [here](#).
- Find answers to your questions [here](#).
- Be inspired by the shining examples of good practices from around the world in our new publication.



Indigenous peoples' centuries long fight against pandemics

The COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly devastating for indigenous communities around the world. Dr. James Makokis, a Saddle Lake Cree Nation medical doctor explains how inequalities and colonialism have both played a nefarious role and how indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge and practices helps them protect the health of their communities.

Infectious diseases have killed more indigenous people than any weapon in the colonial era. How has this impacted their approach to health?

"This is a tricky question and depends which Nation, community, or group of people we are talking about as it varies based on how colonialism has affected traditional Indigenous values. These values will always preserve the integrity of the group and ensure a future for the next generations yet to be born. Some communities are acutely aware of this and have incorporated harm-reduction programs to decrease Hepatitis C and HIV transmission for example. Others struggle with accepting whether a harm-reduction approach align with their current values."

Why are COVID-19 and other pandemics so dangerous to indigenous people in particular?

"COVID-19 has exposed the inequities that have existed in Indigenous Nations and Peoples affected by Colonization since the time of European Contact, notably poverty, the development of chronic diseases, and the dismantling of traditional Indigenous health systems. COVID-19 thrives in inequity and areas where there are decreased sanitation or overcrowding, and this has made Indigenous Peoples particularly vulnerable to this pandemic."

What are some of the unique solutions that indigenous peoples have developed to fight pandemics? Could any of them be scaled up to the wider population?

"Indigenous Peoples have had to assert their sovereignty to their Lands now more so than ever, in order to protect their populations from COVID-19. Many Indigenous leaders were proactive early in the COVID-19 pandemic and assembled security patrols to limit traffic into their communities. This is one strategy that was likely used globally as an important measure to slow the virus early on in the pandemic.

For many Indigenous people, oral history was sufficiently intact to recount the devastation of historic pandemics and more importantly how to ensure their survival. We saw a renewed interest in the use of traditional Indigenous medicines and it was an encouraging sign to see people of all ages start using the medicines we have been gifted in the various territories we live in.

This brings up the important issue of Indigenous Peoples having the right to access medicines freely and without limitations. In Turtle Island, before the existence of the Canada-United States border, Indigenous Peoples were free to trade without the restrictions of Colonial laws that make it illegal to transport biological matter including medicinal plants. Since some of the medicinal plants utilized during previous historic pandemics grow in southern climates, we have had restricted access to using these during the COVID-19 pandemic. This underscores the importance for Indigenous Peoples being able to cross imposed international borders without limiting the health systems we continue to use for survival, including Indigenous medicines.”

For more information: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/egm-indigenous-peoples-and-pandemics.html>

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



Economic statistics alone paint an inadequate picture of development, experts warn

Leading experts, speaking at an event hosted by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Bennett Institute for Public Policy at the University of Cambridge and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of

Germany, warned that present economic statistics omit critical information about the state of ecosystems and societies that underpin the economy.

“After the Second World war, we assumed that if we got the economics right, everything else would fall into place,” said UN Chief Economist Elliott Harris. “We’ve seen that that is simply not true. The measure of economic prosperity that we’ve been using doesn’t allow us to understand how we’re doing on the social and environmental dimensions.”

Until now, the economy and the environment have been regarded as being in different spheres, said Diane Coyle, Bennett Professor of Public Policy at the University of Cambridge. But the imperative for sustainability “is that you have to think about the future. We have to embed sustainability in decision-making.”

The experts warn that while a statistic such as GDP does a good job of showing the value of produced goods and services, it does not show the true value of assets that will be handed to the next generation. GDP does not reflect the degradation of natural capital, such as the deterioration of air quality or the loss of a forest. Economists call these unaccounted for spillover effects externalities.

It is estimated that human activity has severely altered 75 per cent of the planet’s terrestrial – and 66 per cent of its marine environment, leading to a 47 per cent decrease in ecosystem extent and condition indicators, compared to their natural baselines.

“Externalities are so perfidious because they are hidden,” said UN Chief Economist Elliott Harris. “This system exposes them to clear scrutiny. It is a major step in the right direction.”

“Policy makers are used to the well-established accounts behind GDP which focus on flows of economic activity rather than stocks or assets,” said Sir Partha Dasgupta, Professor at Cambridge University. “It is absolutely essential to have accounts for natural capital assets. The entire future is reflected in the assets you’ve got.”

Already, more than 30 countries have tried this new system. Most recently, Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa have tested this new method of accounting under the EU-funded project Natural Capital Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services.

For further information, see:

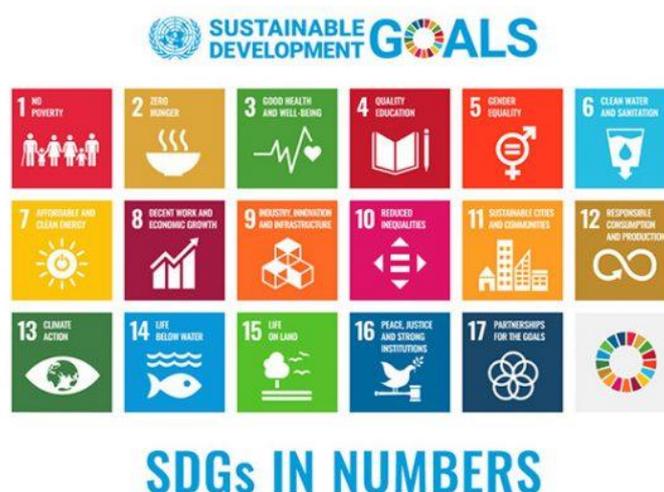
How Natural Capital Accounting Contributes to Integrated Policies for Sustainability and associated reports (United Nations, 2020); and

Building Forward: Investments in a Resilient Recovery (Agarwala, et al 2020).

The Dasgupta Review on the Economics of Biodiversity (HM Treasury, 2020).

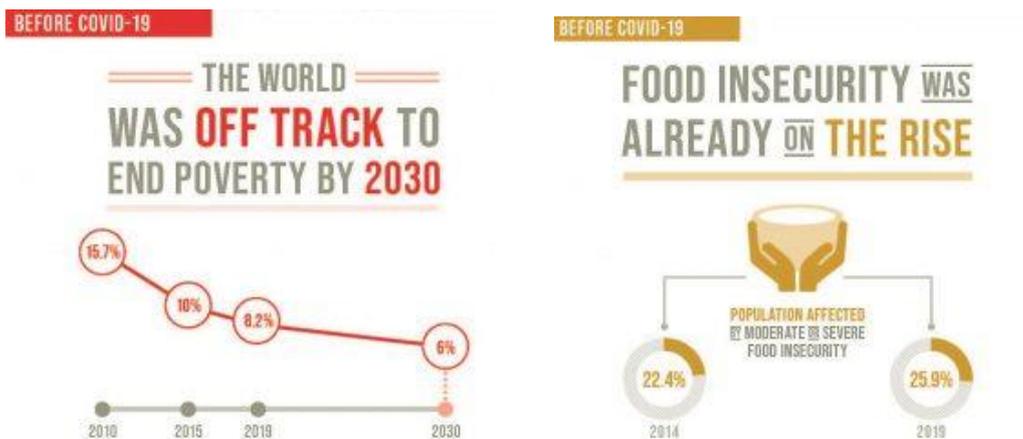
MORE FROM UNDESA

All 17 SDGs in numbers



While progress has been made over the last five years, the world is not on track to deliver the Goals by 2030. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, progress was visible in some areas: the incidence of many communicable diseases was in decline; the global maternal mortality ratio had declined by 38% and the under-5 mortality rate had fallen by almost 50% since 2000; and over 1 billion people had gained access to electricity between 2010 and 2018.

At the same time, the number of people suffering from hunger and food insecurity was rising, climate change was occurring much faster than anticipated and inequality continued to increase within and among countries.



COVID-19 is having a devastating impact on all 17 Goals and threatening the achievements already made in many areas. The pandemic has overwhelmed health systems, disrupted global value chains and the supply of products, caused businesses and factories to shut down, and severely impacted the livelihoods of half of the global workforce.

An estimated 88 million to 115 million people will be pushed back into extreme poverty and up to 132 million more people may suffer from undernourishment in 2020, erasing the modest progress made in recent years. The pandemic has also caused school closures which kept millions of students worldwide out of school. Hundreds of thousands of additional under-5 deaths will be expected in 2020.



While the virus has impacted everyone, it is the poorest and most vulnerable who are affected disproportionately by the pandemic, including children, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees and informal sector workers. Across the globe, young people are also being disproportionately affected, particularly in the job market. Women and girls are facing new barriers and new threats, ranging from a shadow pandemic of violence to additional burdens of unpaid care work. The devastating impacts of COVID-19 demonstrate precisely why we need the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and underscore the urgency of their implementation.

Access more data and information on the indicators for all SDGs in the [SDG Progress Report 2020](#).



UPCOMING EVENTS

As a preventive measure amidst the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, some of the high-level meetings organized by UN DESA worldwide have been postponed, cancelled or are taking place virtually in a scaled down format. Others are still being reviewed. Find out the latest information about the affected events: [UN DESA Calendar](#): [UN DESA Calendar](#).

FIND US ALSO ON:



© United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
[Unsubscribe](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Copyright](#)