



2020 ECOSOC Integration Segment

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Proposed Intervention by

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Lead Discussant on the Session on “Getting back on track for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals”

I would like to thank Ambassador Mona Juul, President of ECOSOC and Permanent Representative of Norway, and Ambassador Mher Margaryan, ECOSOC Vice-President and Chair of this Segment, as well as previous speakers for this important discussion.

The homogenous designation of a “middle-income country” does not reflect the myriad of realities faced by the countries the term encompasses and oversimplifies the complexities they face. Middle-income countries, or MICs, taken together, is a highly heterogeneous group. We are talking about more than a hundred countries that account for more than half of the UN membership, majority of the world’s population, two thirds of the world’s poor, more than a third of global GDP, and a quarter of world’s exports and imports.

With this profile, even pre-COVID, we had already stressed, persistently, the following:

1. The Sustainable Development Goals and Targets cannot be achieved without addressing the needs and specific challenges of middle-income countries, who are themselves major engines of growth;

2. To accurately understand the development needs of MICs, there is a need to identify and address the structural gaps in these countries, and to determine mechanisms capable of attending those gaps with greater efficiency and precision;
3. Efforts to create an enabling environment for development for MICs need to be undertaken at all levels – national, regional and global; and
4. Economic growth is not equivalent to sustainable development. The current methodology of measuring development, based solely on per capita income, is outdated and flawed. Such metric is not a reflection of realistic development if the structural gaps of each country are not taken into account, in particular, socioeconomic inequalities, multidimensional poverty, and vulnerabilities or systemic risks.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global shock that has exacerbated existing challenges and created new vulnerabilities for middle-income countries, setting back progress and development gains made during the past many years. Recent data generated by various UN entities and reflected in the SG Policy Briefs have highlighted that the substantial drop in remittances, loss of full-time employment, loss of employment in the informal sector and debt risk due to the pandemic are specifically being felt in, and will acutely impact, middle-income countries. FAO has pronounced that the human and economic toll from the pandemic will be massive, and that low- and middle-income countries are poised to be worst affected. Most of the hungry and undernourished populations today live in middle-income countries. Further, WHO has stated that COVID-19 has revealed gaps in health systems, with low- and middle-income countries bearing the brunt of lack of investment in public health systems and shortages of health care workers.

As a specific case in point, according to ECLAC, in Latin America, a region composed of mainly MICs, 30 million people will sink back into poverty and 12 million will likely lose their jobs because of the pandemic.

Concrete challenges have been brought to fore such as tradeoffs between risks to health and the multidimensional impacts of the pandemics; decisions on short-term needs vs. long-term investments; a potentially widening digital divide; resource constraints that have not allowed us to sustain some environmental gains; and productive capacity for medicines and vaccine development

For the way forward, we underline the following:

1. It is in the best interest of humanity that we collectively work in building a **transformational, inclusive and forward-looking model of cooperation for**

global sustainable development. The way middle-income countries are assessed should change. We challenge the validity of modalities used to address development levels inasmuch as the achievement of sustainable development in its three dimensions requires working in conditions that go beyond income, such as, among others, equality, inclusion, healthy ecosystems, and access to services;

2. We need to foster **an open and innovative dialogue about the multidimensional concept of development** that will consider broadening the vision of the international community in this regard to create more appropriate, focused and efficient solutions to achieve the ambitious goals of sustainable development, responding to the particular needs of each country;
3. We reiterate our request for the UN Development System to address the interests and specific challenges of MICs in a **comprehensive, holistic and UN-system wide approach**, [prioritizing UN agencies' inter-agency work based on their mandates and comparative advantages](#), noting that both the Agenda 2030 and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda explicitly recognize the need to address the challenges of middle-income countries. On this point, we welcome the call of the Secretary-General for the **UNDS to evolve its support to middle-income countries in all their diversity**;
4. We highlight the importance of **access to international cooperation** for MICs, in particular for climate finance, biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, disaster risk reduction and prevention and preparation for future epidemics and pandemics. **South-South and triangular cooperation** should be harnessed, and **cooperation between national scientific systems** should be strengthened to avoid leaving anyone behind in the recovery;
5. **Middle-income countries should not be left out of funds and programs to recover better from this pandemic.** UN agencies should continue to support MICs with greater resources to confront the humanitarian and socioeconomic crisis of COVID-19, including for countries hosting migrants and refugees, which further strain the resources available;
6. Finally, we request the Secretary General for **an analysis report on the impact of COVID-19 on middle-income countries, with policy recommendations for the UN system.**

Thank you, Chair.

