



UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY HIGH-LEVEL MEETING
ON MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES

11 MAY 2023

TRUSTEESHIP COUNCIL CHAMBER, UN HEADQUARTERS

CONCEPT NOTE

Background

Middle-income countries (MICs) are a large and heterogeneous group that exhibits a broad range of development achievements and challenges. For MICs, the World Bank income classification ranges from the per capita income of about \$1,000 to more than \$12,000 per year, with 107 countries currently ranked as middle-income. Included in the group of middle-income countries are 20 least developed countries, 19 landlocked developing countries and 29 small island developing states. The group also contains 57 countries with a “very high” or “high” human development index. Together, MICs account for around three quarters of the world population and are home to over 60 per cent of world’s poor. They represent about one third of world GDP and are major engines of global growth. They currently contribute around 60 per cent of global CO₂ emissions (mostly due to about ten rapidly growing economies).

Recent external shocks have exacerbated the vulnerabilities of many middle-income countries. The multiple and overlapping current crises – including the global cost-of-living crisis, food insecurity, growing sovereign debt burdens, high geopolitical and geoeconomic tensions, increased environmental degradation and pollution, and the worsening climate crisis – have amplified challenges and constrained countries’ resources to address them. Many middle-income countries are also particularly vulnerable to natural hazards that are increasing in intensity and frequency due to the impacts of climate change.

MICs face the challenge of designing and implementing coherent and consistent policy measures to address vulnerabilities in the short-term and strengthen sustainable development trajectories in the long term, considering and integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development. There is a need for enhanced financial and technical support and partnerships to help middle-income countries overcome their challenges and unleash their potential to contribute to the provision of global public goods.

In order to further their sustainable development agendas and economic, social, and structural transformation, MICs must address key environmental challenges. Worsening climate, declining

biodiversity and nature and pollution, set back our economic achievements and the goal of a just society, which these environmental conditions determine to a great extent. Increasingly rapid declines in ecosystem functions are projected to continue to 2050 and beyond if major policy reorientations are not pursued. Many of these challenges cut across disciplines and/or are multi-sectoral, requiring an integrated, holistic approach.

The recent trend suggests that the natural capital of the world is on decline in spite of our impressive performance in amassing other types of capital. We must assess the natural capital on which our wellbeing depends, on a regular basis and integrate it in the way we measure our progress towards sustainable development.

In accordance with General Assembly Resolution 76/215 adopted on 17 December 2021 entitled “Development cooperation with middle-income countries”, the President of the General Assembly will convene a High-level Meeting on Middle-Income Countries on 11 May 2023 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 3 to 6 p.m., in the Trusteeship Council Chamber, at the United Nations Headquarters, New York.

Theme and Objective

The High-level Meeting is being held under the theme “*Accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in middle-income countries, with a focus on the environmental dimension*” and organized to take stock of the gaps and challenges of middle-income countries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and promote implementation of the SDGs through practical, evidence- and science-based solutions. The discussions will also address the current socio-economic fallout from the pandemic and how it has underlined and exacerbated existing fragilities, with negative and severe consequences for achieving the SDGs, considering the interlinkages among the environmental, economic and social dimensions. The high-level meeting aims to:

- **Take stock** of the gaps and bottlenecks in MICs in addressing environmental challenges which hinder sustainable development;
- **Identify solutions** for promoting the achievement of the environmental dimension of sustainable development as the catalyzers for the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and propose action-oriented steps forward;
- **Assess the effectiveness** of the development support to MICs by the UN development system in the environmental dimension and identify measures that advance progress through a whole-of-system approach;
- **Enhance partnership and synergy** among Member States, all sectors of society, domestic and international partners to accelerate action to address environmental challenges and boost sustainable development in MICs; and,

- **Discuss measurements** of sustainable development that go beyond GDP to better reflect the progress of sustainable development across all dimensions and guide national policy-making and development cooperation.

Main Sessions

Opening Segment

- **Remarks** by PGA and other high-level representatives
- **Overview** of the key challenges and opportunities facing MICs to advance the environmental dimension of sustainable development by high-level representatives of the United Nations.

Interactive Panel Discussion

- **Panel 1: MICs' best practices and lessons learned to overcome challenges and harness opportunities to enhance sustainable development**

Share national and local solutions, practices, and ambitious initiatives of MICs to advance the environmental dimension of sustainable development, including to enhance the implementation of global environmental commitments, promote the alignment of public and private financial flows with environmental, climate and sustainable development commitments and encourage transformations of high impact sectors to contribute to a healthy planet. Demonstrate how MICs further contribute through South-South and triangular cooperation strategies to the achievement of a sustainable transformation.

Guiding questions:

- What are effective solutions, policies, initiatives and practices to advance the environmental dimension of sustainable development?
 - How do poverty reduction accomplishments in MICs interact with climate, biodiversity and restoration targets?
 - How do MICs cooperate to achieve the environmental dimension of the SDGs and promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda including through South-South and triangular Cooperation?
- **Panel 2: Support of the United Nations system and others to advance international development cooperation with MICs, including in the environmental dimension**

The United Nations development system aims to be a trusted, reliable, cohesive, accountable and effective partner to countries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Against the backdrop of the COVID19 pandemic and increasing global risks including climate change, water stresses, and food insecurity, improved support from the United Nations and other multilateral agencies should focus on addressing priority issues that prevent progress on sustainable development, including

the environmental dimension. This requires improved coordination among UN entities, other international partners, donors and multi-stakeholder partners, to provide integrated high-quality policy advice, strengthen institutions, capacity development and support for the leveraging of partnerships and financing.

Guiding questions:

- How could the UN better assist MICs to implement transformative initiatives to address key environmental and development challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution and waste, and improve access to financing and capacity building?
- How could the UN system and other multilateral partners further enhance inter-agency synergies and collaboration in assisting MICs to address environmental challenges and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda?

Panel 3: Measuring what counts to ensure a healthy planet for healthy people

In a dynamic world, especially in the light of the past pandemic, society needs a credible system of measurements to track progress and sustainability. Conventional measurements of economic output are inadequate. Going beyond GDP is an essential step to make the development cooperation paradigm fit for purpose, allowing developing countries to better assess their development progress and global contributions, and address their needs. Decision-makers need a dashboard of indicators that can reveal the factors contributing to human wellbeing and whether economic and social development is environmentally sustainable.

Among the complementary measurements for assessing and measuring progress is *inclusive wealth*, which measures the assets that underpin human well-being: natural, human, social, produced and financial capital. Measuring inclusive wealth is key to driving sustainable investments across policy areas.

The Panel would facilitate a wider discussion on the conservation and sustainable use of our natural capital, and changing the measurement of sustainable development, in order to better guide national policymaking and development cooperation. A new measurement of sustainable development and the involvement of all stakeholders in protecting and sustainably using our natural capital will not only better assist all developing countries, but also unleash their potential to contribute to the protection of global commons.

Guiding questions:

- What are the key limitations of conventional measurements to track progress and sustainability in capturing the environmental dimension of sustainable development?
- How can all externalities be integrated into the measurement of development in MICs, including the value of natural capital and environmental vulnerabilities?
- How can the impact on nature, climate and pollution be considered in economic strategy and financing in the post pandemic era?

- How could the private sector / international development partners contribute to the sustainable transformation in MICs?

Outcome

The President of the General Assembly will compile and circulate a brief summary of the High-level Meeting, and it will feed into the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the General Assembly resolution 76/215.

Format

The High-level Meeting will take place in person.

For the interactive panel discussions, each panelist will make a 3-5-minutes presentation and answer questions from the moderator, followed by interaction with representatives in the conference room. There will be no pre-established list of speakers. Participants wishing to take the floor during the interactive discussions are invited to press the microphone button. Member States are encouraged to consider including in their national delegations to the high-level meeting ministers from all relevant ministries, as well as representatives such as parliamentarians, mayors and governors, representatives of civil society, including non-governmental organizations, and organizations and networks, indigenous leadership, community organizations and faith-based organizations, academia, philanthropic foundations, and the private sector, with due regard to gender equity.

The High-level Meeting will be open to ECOSOC-accredited NGOs.

The meeting will be webcast on UN WebTV.

Program

Time		Session
<i>10:00-10:30</i>		Opening segment
<i>10:30-13:00</i>		Interactive panel 1
Lunch break		
<i>15:00-16:30</i>		Interactive panel 2
<i>16:30-18:00</i>		Interactive panel 3