

Thirteenth Meeting of the  
**United Nations Economist Network (UNEN)**

Thursday, 21 January 2021  
8:30 – 10:30 a.m.

Mr. Elliott Harris, Assistant Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and Chief Economist of the United Nations, welcomed participants and introduced the agenda: (i) RCO Economists Proposals – Topics of interest and potential areas for collaboration; and (ii) Work on New Economics for Sustainable Development - Alternative economic models and concepts.

Mr. Harris referred to the discussions at the previous UNEN meeting on the establishment of a UNEN webpage, which will be set up on the DESA website to present UNEN deliverables, including the thematic briefs. UN system entities could make reference to that page on their respective websites. Mr. Harris added that the link to a preliminary template of the UNEN webpage (<https://www.un.org/en/desa/unen>) had been shared with participants. The template includes a link [entitled presentations] for posting material, such as relevant publications, presentations by UNEN members etc. Mr. Harris invited comments on the template and asked what criteria participants would suggest for deciding which material should be included on the page. Participants suggested to include, in addition to standard analytical material and flagship publications, policy briefs by UN system entities on COVID-19. It was agreed to establish an editorial board to, among others, review requests for posting. It was also proposed to develop editorial guidelines for the thematic briefs.

**RCO Economists Proposals – Topics of interest and potential areas for collaboration**

Mr. Harris noted that an updated list on topics of interest and potential areas of collaboration suggested by country economists had been circulated, and thanked DCO for compiling that list. Mr. Harris indicated that agencies may wish to consider the various topics and areas that may be of interest to be addressed by agencies individually/jointly or might be addressed by UNEN. It would also be important to discuss how to choose among the various topics the ones that will be addressed first and in what form.

The meeting discussed the various topics contained in the list. In this context reference was made to the *Initiative on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond*, launched by the Secretary-General and the Prime Ministers of Canada and Jamaica. This work is organized into the following six clusters:

- (i) Sustainability and climate action, led by UNDP;
- (ii) Socio-economic response: social protection, gender, youth, health, education and human rights, led by ILO;

- (iii) Finance and technology, led by UNCTAD;
- (iv) Liquidity and debt vulnerability, led by DESA;
- (v) Illicit financial flows, led by the Regional Economic Commissions; and
- (vi) Addressing special country needs, led by DESA.

It was stressed that UNEN would need to avoid overlap with work currently ongoing in this area. It was also mentioned that UNEN work was linked to the current work on CCAs.

After discussion on the topics contained in the list compiled by DCO, the meeting agreed to select 2 out of the 5 below topics for follow-up and further consideration. Participants were asked to inform Mr. Harris' office which 2 topics they suggest focusing on. The next meeting in February would reflect on how UNEN can best accommodate these topics:

- (i) Financing for Development post COVID-19;
- (ii) Build nature/climate/restoration into post-COVID-19 recovery plans;
- (iii) Digitalization and economic transformation;
- (iv) Development of Multi-dimensional Vulnerability Indicator;
- (v) Re-define policy support incentives for sustainable development.

### **Work on New Economics for Sustainable Development (NESD) - Alternative economic models and concepts**

Mr. Harris noted that a list had been circulated with the expressions of interest that were received for participating in and/or co-leading the working groups that will be established in the area of new economics for development. He stressed that the list was not yet closed.

Mr. Harris asked what would be the appropriate output for the work on NESD? What are the commonalities among the various concepts? How do the concepts link to the 2030 Agenda? He indicated that a position paper would be prepared with the entry points, linkages to the SDGs, commonalities among the NESD concepts, and recommendations for next steps. A one-pager with guidance for working groups would be circulated prior to the next meeting.

Participants mentioned that the following questions would need to be addressed by the working groups: (i) How do the NESD concepts challenge mainstream economics? (ii) What is new about these concepts? What "re-thinks" are needed? How do the new concepts affect policy making? It was agreed that the first output of the working groups should be "light". Smaller outputs could eventually feed into a larger report. Details on how to proceed would be discussed at the UNEN meeting in February.

**Follow-up action:**

- **An editorial board for the UNEN webpage will be established.**
- **Further to the updated list on topics of interest and potential areas of collaboration suggested by country economists, participants will inform Mr. Harris' office which 2 topics they suggest selecting for follow-up.**
- **A one-pager with guidance for NESD working groups will be circulated.**