

Fourteenth Meeting of the
United Nations Economist Network (UNEN)

Wednesday, 24 February 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, 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.

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

Mr. Harris noted that out of the 5 topics that were proposed by RCO economists for follow-up at the last meeting in January, the following 2 topics received the strongest support: (i) Digitalization and economic transformation; and (ii) Financing for Development post COVID-19.

Participants discussed how UNEN can best accommodate these 2 topics. With regard to Digitalization and economic transformation the discussion focused on what would need to happen to accelerate the digitalization process. It was suggested to explore how governments can facilitate access to devices that make digital literacy possible.

The importance of distinctly addressing the question of the digital divide was highlighted. Digital access should be connected to basic infrastructure and to digital literacy. Participants stressed that governance standards and legal frameworks need to be considered in this context as well. They reiterated that it would be valuable to share specific country experiences.

It was also mentioned that a number of UN initiatives are ongoing (SG's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation; Internet Governance Forum; High-Level Committee on Programme; UNSDG Task Team on Digitalization; etc.). It is therefore important that UNEN discusses where best to concentrate efforts.

There was consensus to narrow down the topic and to focus on economic analysis. A targeted approach was recommended while not losing sight of big picture. Participants suggested coming up with a narrow, focused theme that can be explored in the network. It was agreed to continue the discussions under this agenda item at the UNEN meeting in March.

With regard to Financing for Development post COVID-19, participants noted that a number of initiatives are ongoing in the area of Financing for Development. One example is the “Initiative on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond”, launched by the SG and

the Prime Ministers of Canada and Jamaica. It is therefore important to identify a niche for UNEN to avoid overlap and duplication.

Participants raised the question how best to make information available and accessible on the UN work in the area of Financing for Development. The reports of the Interagency Task Force on Financing for Development were mentioned as a source of information.

Mr. Harris proposed that UNEN may consider focusing on innovative financing, SDG bonds and opportunities for developing countries in that context. Participants also referred, among others, to access to finance, risk-informed financing, vulnerability flows and the Multi-dimensional Vulnerability Indicator. The links of these topics to the working groups on New Economics for Sustainable Development (NESD) were mentioned.

Participants referred to the following initiatives and documents of their respective agencies:

- ECLAC's proposal on universalizing digital technologies ([Universalizar el acceso a las tecnologías digitales para enfrentar los efectos del COVID-19 | Publication | Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean \(cepal.org\)](#))
- UN Call for Inputs to the IATT Report for the STI Forum 2021 (<https://sdgs.un.org/news/un-call-inputs-iatt-report-sti-forum-2021-32583>).
- UNCTAD's eReadiness assessment and eTradeForAll (<https://etradeforall.org/>
<https://unctad.org/topic/e-commerce-and-digital-economy/etrade-readiness-assessments-of-LDCs>)
- UNECE: <https://unece.org/ppp/icoe/standards>
<https://unece.org/eci/documents/2020/12/session-documents/draft-people-first-ppp-evaluation-methodology-sdgs>
- UNESCWA: <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/egypt-stabilization-knowledge-based-economy-english.pdf>
- UN E-Government Survey: <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Reports/UN-E-Government-Survey-2020>
- The Better than Cash alliance: <https://www.betterthancash.org/>

- New SDG Bond in Mexico: https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/news/2020/Historic_890_million_SDG_Bond_issued_by_Mexico.html
- FAO: <http://www.fao.org/3/cb1149en/CB1149EN.pdf>
- The UNDP report “Innovative Finance and the SDGs” that was prepared at the request of the G20 Japanese Presidency in 2019 (attached).
- The Roadmap: “The Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond Initiative: The Way Forward” (attached).

Work on New Economics for Sustainable Development - Alternative economic models and concepts

Mr. Harris referred to the template/proposal for a common approach that had been circulated prior to the meeting. He thanked Ms. Chantal Line Carpentier, UNCTAD, and Mr. Paul Ladd, UNRISD, for preparing the template. **Working groups were asked to complete the template and send a 2-pager to Ms. Phyllis Roberts and Ms. Ursula Germann by Wednesday 17 March.** The 2-pagers will be shared with the Network prior to the 15th UNEN meeting, which has been tentatively scheduled for Wednesday 24 March.

Ms. Chantal Line Carpentier indicated that support, especially for the purple and yellow/attention economy working groups, would be welcome.

Any Other Business

Ms. Ursula Germann provided an update on the development of the UNEN webpage, which will be hosted on the DESA website (<https://www.un.org/en/desa/unen>). She explained that this is also the link entities can use to make reference to the UNEN page on their respective websites. In addition to information about UNEN, material of UNEN members, such as flagship publications of entities, presentations by UNEN members, and other analytical documents will also be posted on the page. Ms. Germann added that, as agreed previously, an editorial board will be established, which will review requests for posting this material. She noted that colleagues were welcome to share comments and feedback on the page.

Mr. Harris informed participants that UNCTAD will brief on the Productive Capacities Index at the UNEN meeting in March.

Follow-up action:

- **Key points on the discussions on *Digitalization and Economic Transformation* and on *Financing for Development post COVID-19* will be shared prior to the next meeting. A proposal on how best to address these topics will be developed and discussed at the UNEN meeting in March.**
- **Working groups will complete the NESD template and send a 2-pager to Ms. Phyllis Roberts and Ms. Ursula Germann by Wednesday 17 March.**