

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

Wednesday, 24 March 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) UNCTAD's Productive Capacities Index (PCI) – Presentation followed by Q&A; (ii) New Economics for Sustainable Development (NESD) – Discussion of 2-pagers prepared by Working Groups; and (iii) RCO Economists Proposals: Digitalization and Economic Transformation; and Financing for Development post COVID-19.

**UNCTAD's Productive Capacities Index (PCI)**

Following presentations by Mr. Mussie Delelegn and Ms. Nour Barnat, UNCTAD, participants engaged in a lively Q&A session and agreed to continue the discussions bilaterally. The presentations were shared with UNEN members. Additional information is available at <https://pci.unctad.org> and at <https://unctadstat.unctad.org>.

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

Mr. Harris thanked the working group co-leads for the timely submissions of the 2-pagers on concepts for a New Economics for Sustainable Development (NESD). He thanked Mr. Alex Julca for preparing the "Sustainability Scorecard on NESD Concepts". Mr. Harris invited co-leads to give a brief overview of their respective analysis, taking into consideration links with other concepts.

Mr. Stuart Davies, RCO Barbados and Eastern Caribbean, reported on the Blue Economy working group. He noted that the term blue economy is difficult to define as it sits in 2 competing ways: opportunities for growth and development; and vulnerable spaces in need of protection. Beyond SDG 14, the blue economy contributes to SDGs 2, 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 17. Mr. Stuart mentioned the economic and social impact of ocean resources. He stressed the challenges to define and measure the value of blue economy assets.

Ms. Chantal Line Carpentier, UNCTAD, briefed on the Purple/Care Economy working group, which ascribes a central role to both paid and unpaid care work provided largely by women and vulnerable groups. The care economy cuts across most SDGs, directly promotes SDG 5 and

contributes to SDG 10. It also promotes the achievement of SDGs 1, 2, 3 and 4. Ms. Carpentier noted that the care economy supports the “Leave No One Behind” principle of the 2030 Agenda. It generates positive outcomes in social dimension through economic empowerment of women, and could be a driver to advance green transition. Challenging aspects of the care economy are related to its externalities, mainly due to its public goods characteristics, and to its measurement.

Mr. Alex Julca, DESA, gave an update on the Circular Economy working group. He said that the circular economy considers natural resources as finite and focuses on preventing waste. The circular economy is multi-dimensional and can deliver towards multiple SDGs. It is closely linked to the implementation of SDG 12 and also relevant for SDGs 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14 and 15. Mr. Julca noted that a social benefit dimension of the concept is having a better environment and preservation of natural wealth. A rebalancing of economic policies and instruments is needed to incentivize development and competitiveness of circular economy markets.

Ms. Marisa Henderson, UNCTAD, reported on the Creative Economy working group. She noted that the creative economy is an evolving concept, which embraces economic, cultural and social aspects interacting with technology, intellectual property and tourism objectives. The creative economy contributes to the achievement of the broader objectives of the 2030 Agenda. It aligns with a variety of SDGs, especially 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, and 17. There are significant challenges to give the creative economy the attention it deserves and to recognize it as important sector. More research needs to be done to collect data for the creative industries in developing countries.

Samuel Bruelisauer, UNRISD, briefed on the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) working group. He highlighted that SSE refers to forms of economic activity that prioritizes social and environmental objectives. The variety of organizations making up the SSE have been shown to contribute to all 17 SDGs. SDGs 1, 5, 8, and 12 are among those most strongly associated with the SSE impacts. Mr. Bruelisauer added that, while high quality and up-to-date research is not available on a global scale, several studies on SSE suggest its contribution to global GDP and employment to be about 10 percent, with strong variation among countries.

Mr. Hoi Wai Jackie Cheng, DESA, briefed on the Attention Economy working group. He indicated that defining the concept of the attention economy is challenging. It focuses on understanding attention as a scarce resource that every human owns. Guiding the attention economy towards truthfulness and quality of information could help advance SDG 16. The attention economy also relates to SDGs 5, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15 and SDG 3.4, which covers mental health and wellbeing. Mr. Cheng noted that making the attention economy compatible with sustainable development requires addressing the fundamental issue of digital platform

governance. He concluded that more research is needed in a number of areas of the attention economy.

Ms. Chantal Line Carpentier, UNCTAD, gave an update on the Frugal Innovation working group. She noted that a definition of the concept is challenging. While frugal innovation is strongly linked to ideas of fairness, inclusivity and community approaches and improvement, it is also driven by a profit motivation. The concept of frugal innovation directly contributes to SDG 9 and how to achieve the SDGs through different dimensions of innovation. It also relates to a number of other SDGs. Ms. Carpentier stressed that, if instead of thinking in terms of the \$2.5 trillion needed to achieve the SDGs, we focus on the abundance of entrepreneurial spirit and innovation, including reusing existing resources, the concept could be very powerful. A major unknown of the concept is its scalability.

Mr. Harris thanked the working groups for their contributions and noted that the UNEN meeting in April would discuss next steps and how best to carry forward the work on NESD.

### **RCO Economists Proposals**

Due to the limited time available for the discussion of this agenda item, Mr. Harris proposed to establish 2 working groups, on “Innovative Finance” and on “Digitalization and Economic Transformation”. The 2 working groups will meet prior to the UNEN meeting in April to discuss how best to address these topics and map out parameters for this area of work. Mr. Harris invited colleagues to inform him should they be interested in participating in one or both of the working groups.