

The Decade of Action

Recovering better after COVID-19 demands that we redouble our ambition, decisiveness and urgency to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



By **Amina J. Mohammed**, Deputy Secretary-General to the United Nations

In September 2019, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to accelerate efforts to deliver on the ambitious, universal and inclusive 2030 Agenda.

The United Nations Secretary-General has called on all sectors of society to mobilise for the Decade of Action on three levels:

- **Global action:** to secure greater leadership, more resources and smarter solutions for the SDGs.
- **Local action:** to embed the needed transitions in the policies, budgets, institutions and regulatory frameworks of governments, cities and local authorities.
- **People action:** to mobilise youth, civil society, the media, the private sector, unions, academia and other stakeholders to generate an unstoppable movement for the required transformations.

But, right at the start of the Decade of Action, the COVID-19 pandemic knocked us off-kilter, taking hundreds of thousands of lives, and affecting the livelihoods of billions. Hard-earned progress on poverty eradication, vaccinations, education and gender equality risks being halted or reversed. Systemic vulnerabilities and pre-existing inequalities are exacerbated and more acutely felt than ever, particularly by the most marginalised.

SDG implementation was already off track before the pandemic. Many argue that the road ahead could be even more challenging, with the world potentially facing even higher levels of poverty, unemployment and gender inequality, massive gaps in financing, as well as a rapidly worsening climate emergency.

New normal

But, if we take a closer look, we will see how the pandemic has taught us a few things too.

◀ Amina J. Mohammed and the UN delegation join the 'Walk for Life' to celebrate International Women's Day during their visit to Papua New Guinea. The delegation was in the country to discuss gender equality, youth engagement, sorcery-related violence, climate change and conflict resolution and peacebuilding

We are seeing more clearly how the systems on which we depend – for food, trade, health and climate – are interdependent. We are seeing more clearly the benefits of universal health coverage, social protection, and universal access to basic services like energy, water and sanitation, quality education, and the internet. We are seeing more clearly the consequences of inequalities that expose billions of people to the risk of poverty and financial collapse during periods of economic shock. We have been forced out of our comfort zones, made to embrace a new normal that we didn't know was possible before, and which has much less environmental impact. These hard-learned lessons will help us recover better and put us on a path towards accelerated sustainable development.

Going forward, the SDGs remain our North Star, guiding us to address the most pressing global and local challenges across environmental, social and economic dimensions. The SDGs are our common plan to reverse the damage we have been inflicting on our natural environment. The SDGs are a call for unity, for international cooperation, for partnerships and solidarity. They will guide us to rebuild a more resilient, sustainable, equitable and inclusive future.

There are still many achievements on which we can build, despite the setbacks from the pandemic. In the past five years, we have seen an unprecedented mobilisation towards the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. We have seen this in the hundreds of voluntary reports from national governments presented to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. We have seen stakeholders – from civil society to community organisations, from multinational companies to small and medium-sized enterprises, from local and regional governments to universities, from schools to individuals, especially young people – embrace the SDGs.

We have also seen how the entire UN system, in particular through a new Resident Coordinator system, has been reformed to ensure we are providing the best possible support to Member States in their efforts towards the 2030 Agenda.

Delivering the SDGs in the next decade will demand ambition, decisiveness and a sense of urgency. This should be translated into increased investments in public services, including social protection, health systems, education, water, sanitation and digital connectivity. It will entail pursuing a recovery that builds an inclusive, green and gender-responsive economy while reshaping the way we work, learn, live and consume. It will mean listening to the world's youth, who are demanding justice, equality and sustainability. It will require solidarity and foresight on financing.

Effective multilateralism

The year 2020 also marks the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. Today's challenges demand us to reimagine multilateralism and ensure that effective global governance is a reality when it is needed.

Now is the time to create an inclusive, networked and effective multilateralism, one based on the powerful ideals and objectives enshrined in the Charter and in the agreements defined across the decades since. It must be a multilateralism built on trust, based on international law and geared towards the overarching goals of peace and security, human rights and sustainable development.

The Decade of Action for the SDGs will demand the mobilisation of everyone everywhere, grounded on a level of ambition that supercharges ideas into concrete, bold and implementable solutions. We need to share experiences, and to understand what works and what can be replicated or taken to greater scale. We need to renew our determination to enact a multilateral response that gears recovery efforts through multi-stakeholder partnerships. Furthermore, we need to drive sustainable innovation, financial investments and technology – while making space in our communities and cities for young people to lead.

I commend the UNA-UK for the seventh edition of *Sustainable Development Goals*. I hope this publication inspires and energises all of us to press ahead and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Decade of Action. ●