



## Global South Voices at 2022 UN High-level Political Forum

By Antje Hipkins

Since the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), the United Nations has annually convened the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council annually and at Summit level under the auspices of the General Assembly every four years. The HLPF is the main mechanism through which UN Member States assess global progress on meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Member States can present their country reports on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). The main SDGs for review at the 2022 HLPF were SDG 4 on quality education, SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 14 on life below water, SDG 15 on life on land, and SDG 17 on global partnerships, with an overall theme on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted development progress.

At the first High-level Political Forum held in person since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in July 2022, 44 countries presented VNRs, including many **Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS)**. These countries focused on progress toward achieving the 2030 Agenda and the impact of COVID-19 on countries' development plans, progress on gender equality, specific vulnerabilities in the face of multiple global crises, and the urgency of increasing climate resilience. Some emphasized the importance of a shift away from reliance on Gross National Income (GNI) as a key measure of development, as well as concern about the ability of LDCs to continue developing sustainably after graduating from the category.

### Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) and LDC Graduation

- “It is clear that the use of Gross National Income for allocating countries' access to finance does not, on its own, adequately capture the vulnerability and resilience dimensions of development, nor does it map well to the financing needs for development. Therefore, we propose the International Internal Resilience Capacity, the IRC, and the Recovery Duration Adjustor as a forward-looking framework that incorporates both vulnerability and resilience in addressing the development challenge and providing a more equitable tool to underpin access to concessional finance.”  
- Hyginus ‘Gene’ Leon, President, **Caribbean Development Bank (CDB)**
- “While we are defined as middle-income countries our development pathways are very different and not the same as other middle-income countries. Using a criterion only based on economics does nothing but prohibit Small Island States' ability to become

more resilient and achieve the highest level of sustainable development.”

- *Dr. Aubrey Webson, UN Ambassador, **Antigua and Barbuda**, on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)*

- “The MVI is intended to complement GNI per capita. To provide developing countries the opportunity to access the support they need at the global level, based also on their structural vulnerabilities, and not only on indices that have little relevance to their real needs.”

- *Gaston Browne, Prime Minister, **Antigua and Barbuda***

- “Nepal is set to graduate from the LDC status in 2026. Graduation is a milestone for a country moving towards sustainable development, though, it will affect access to concessional development finance and trade preferences. Therefore, we are preparing a graduation strategy in such a way that it will minimize the negative consequences and ensure smooth and irreversible graduation.”

- *Dr. Biswo Nath Poudel, Vice-Chairman, National Planning Commission, **Nepal***

- “As for its work on the Least Developed Countries, the committee welcomes the significant progress made towards graduation from the LDC category over the past decade... The committee expressed its concern and the limited capacity of these countries to address the diverse challenges they face. Reduced fiscal space, a problem aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis, makes it difficult to reconcile short-term recovery with long-term sustainable development.”

- *José Antonio Ocampo, Minister of Finance and Public Credit, **Colombia**, Chair, Committee for Development Policy*

### **Impact of COVID-19 on economic and social development**

- “Limited fiscal space has constrained the ability of Least Developed Countries to take [COVID-19] stimulus measures, including enhanced social protection, and might be further reduced owing to the increasing costs of borrowing. Debt burdens and increasing debt servicing costs are becoming increasingly challenging for these countries, placing them at higher risk of debt distress.”

- ***UNGA Secretariat**, Background Note for session entitled: “African countries, Least Developed Countries and Landlocked Developing Countries: Ensuring equal access to vaccines and resources in the poorest countries”*

- “The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered high levels of poverty, hunger and malnutrition, and inequality in administration of COVID-19 vaccines. The pandemic triggered a global recession with LDCs, LLDCs, and African countries witnessing a significant shrink in their

respective economies. External debt burden and debt service obligations have risen in the past three years resulting in inadequate fiscal space for sustainable development.”

- *Mr. Saitoti Torome, Principal Secretary, State Department for Planning, Kenya*

- “COVID-19’s effects on the economy have been substantial, with Somalia’s GDP dropping to -0.3 percent in 2020, compared to the 3.2 percent growth predicted for the same year.”  
- *Somalia VNR Report*
- “The COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and the recent unprecedented civil unrest present a recent threat to the gains made in reducing extreme poverty by 8 percentage points and poverty by about 4 percentage points between 2010 and 2017. The pandemic has worsened the problems of high unemployment, poverty, inequality, and economic growth. It is anticipated that the proportion of the population living below the national poverty line will increase within the range of 2.3 percent to 5.6 percent as a result of the emerging challenges.”  
- *Eswatini VNR Report*
- “COVID-19 is estimated to increase the incidence of poverty to 25 percent of the population. This is coupled with the current low coverage of social protection, generally high food inflation, high unemployment rate among PWDs and youth, as well as disparities in access to basic services such as health, sanitation, and nutrition.”  
- *Ghana VNR Report*
- “COVID-19 has heightened the threat to food security which is also being fuelled by climate change and biodiversity loss, recurring extreme weather events. Droughts and erratic rainfall pattern spells are linked to significant crop failures, declining agricultural production and productivity affecting rural livelihood opportunities, undermining the country’s attainment of Zero hunger and poverty reduction efforts.”  
- *Fatou Kinteh, Minister for Gender, Children and Social Welfare, Gambia*
- “In the past two years, the food security and nutrition of billions of people has been further undermined by the COVID-19 pandemic, and its ripple effects are still felt across the globe. The measures to contain the pandemic and the scars it has left on global food supply chains have resulted in severe worldwide economic contractions. Today, with the pandemic ongoing and war raging in Ukraine, the global scenario is even more complex, with competing challenges calling for concerted solutions.”  
- *Amina Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General*

## Progress on Gender Equality

- “Gender equality is a reality in Togo and this is the first Prime Minister of Togo that is a female. I can say that we are committed to the participation by women in political and social life. Thirty-five percent of government officials are women and the majority are in strategic posts. The National Assembly has 20 percent of female members. It's also chaired by a woman. We launched a year ago the African Women Programme of Excellence [which bolsters] the capacity of young girls in leadership and in entrepreneurship.”  
- *Simfeitchiou Pre, Minister and Special Advisor to the President, **Republic of Togo***
- “Equal access by the whole population to economic benefits is a guarantee for the success of our ambition. In that regard, Togo has made massive investments in the economic empowerment of women through the National Inclusive Finance Fund. That fund was created in 2014, and it's promoted over 180 million U.S. dollars to nearly 2 million beneficiaries; ninety-five percent of them are women.”  
- *Simfeitchiou Pre, Minister and Special Advisor to the President, **Republic of Togo***
- “In 2020, we established a development division in the Institute of Women with an emphasis on their economic autonomy and also a working group of our National Gender Council to ensure that women are employed and that there is professional training for women. On the other hand, the National Institute of Women developed a programme to enhance the political participation of women.”  
- *Isaac Alfie Stochek, Head of the Office of Planning and Budget, **Uruguay***
- “There’s an urgent need for countries to strengthen their fiscal systems. Because if we don’t set into place the resources that support women and support the education system, then we will not move populations forward, we will not raise living standards, we will not reduce discrimination.... We see more and more women at lower levels, less and less women at higher levels, this needs to also start to change. And when we move people into the workplace, the fact that the informal sector is dominated by women has also got a lot to do with the fact that many women have not received the same access to education and therefore are resorting to the informal sector, in order to earn a living and support themselves.”  
- *Attiya Waris, **UN Independent Expert on Debt***
- “I ask myself, what do you do when you are late for a meeting? You run, don’t you? Well, this is the time to run. We have dates. Time is moving forward and we are lagging behind. And worse still, in many regions, we’re even going backwards. With great anger, and sorrow, today, I stand here, where my colleagues are resisting a violent attack on

their reproductive rights. An attack that reverberates in public health discussions around the world. And COVID was not the one who signed this.”

- *Valentina Munoz Rabanal, SDG Advocate, Youth Feminist Activist, and Digital Rights Advocate, Chile*

- “We need to make progress: poverty and hunger across the world are affecting our people throughout the world, and it is women, children, those who are worst off who suffer the most. This is why we have to come up with some formula to respond to the situation.... when you are thinking of this solution, remember there are women and men, but essentially women, who are defending themselves, who are killed defending their land. In honor of their memory, please, please stand up for them, leave aside your own interests and think of all those that are in need and to whom we have a duty.”

- *Mabel Bianco, President of the Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer, Argentina; Co-Chair of the Coordination Mechanism of Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS)*

### **Vulnerability to Climate Disasters and Increasing Climate Resilience**

- “The adverse impacts of climate change pervade the entire life of Tuvalu and it is the foremost challenge of the country. Erosion, storm events, tidal flooding, saltwater intrusion, drought conditions and bug infestation of trees and plants, are some of the events that are undoing the progress that has been achieved to date. More funding and technical assistance are needed to continue work on adaptive infrastructure, food security, water, transport, communication, alternative energy, coastal protection and land reclamation.”

- *Samuelu Laloni, UN Permanent Representative, Tuvalu*

- “There has been a two-fold increase in strong hurricanes in the Caribbean, within the last decade. This trend will only worsen if global warming remains unchecked. Hurricane Irma in 2017 wreaked absolute havoc in Barbuda. Five years later, we are still struggling to rebuild to the status quo ante, including to build back better. If the global financial system remains as it is, we will never be able to afford another Hurricane Irma.”

- *Gaston Browne, Prime Minister, Antigua and Barbuda*

- “Indeed, in recent years, STP has been faced with rising sea levels, deforestation, intense and uncontrolled rainfall, floods, and landslides, with a devastating effect on food crops production and exports. Furthermore, there has been a decrease in precipitation, with negative impacts for water supply. These development issues hamper activities linked to the agriculture, tourism and fishing sectors, movement of

people and goods, with devastating impacts on the economy and directly endanger the lives of the populations.” - *Edite Ramos da Costa Ten Jua, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Communities of the Democratic Republic, Sao Tome and Principe*

- “A major aspect of wealth lies in its natural resources and biodiversity. But the country is one of the most vulnerable to climate change and sea level rise has begun to affect the coastal region, threatening seventy percent of the population living along the coast.”  
- *Jose Carlos Casimiro Varela, Minister of Economy, Planning and Regional Integration, Guinea-Bissau*
- “Climate change mitigation and adaptation, halting biodiversity loss, reducing land degradation and restoring ecosystems are priorities. Water and soil conservation programmes are being expanded, enclosures and protected areas have been established, greening and irrigation schemes are proceeding, and a vast network of terraces, dams and ponds has been constructed. There are plans for desalination of sea water for domestic use and economic sectors, while degraded land is being restored and rehabilitated.”  
- *Sofia Tesfamariam, UN Permanent Representative, Eritrea*
- “The recent reports from the IPCC in February on adaptation and in May on mitigation have brought us this message very clearly, that we have to peak before 2025 if we have to save the target of 1.5 degrees Celsius. We see very little effort toward that goal.”  
- *Ajay Jha, India, Co-Chair of the MGoS Coordination Mechanism*

### **Holding the Global North accountable**

- “The tone policing that we get from our colleagues in the global North is really problematic. That they call us emotional when we see the destruction in our countries, that they call us irrational, that they call us over the top, and with the implication of a colonial mindset as well, that the rationality is coming from the passivity and the lack of action of our global North colleagues.... What we are seeing in INGOs, what we are seeing in organizations in the global North who call themselves our allies, are precisely merging themselves with a system that is criminal....After the IPCC report was launched, we realized that we only have three years to make a complete systems change. And this doesn't mean that everybody has the same responsibility and needs to act in the same way. It means that the rich countries need to act and that the global South, women, Indigenous Peoples have subsidized the Global North enough....”

- Emilia Reyes, Programme Director, Policies and Budgets for Equality and Sustainable Development, *Equidad de Género: Ciudadanía, Trabajo Familia*, **Mexico**

- “What’s the cause for this distrust? The cause for this distrust is very well-founded and it is that nobody is trusting the global North anymore, I hope, because they shouldn’t. Never, never, ever, trust the global North, and by the global North I mean countries from Western Europe, North America, maybe some in the Pacific, well-off countries that have a lot of power and a lot of money. Because frankly, if we look at the historical responsibility... the whole system that we’re facing... this is not a system that just came out of the ground and came into existence by chance or anything, it was built and it was designed to be exactly that way. So what we’re seeing, the whole economic system, that whole system of inequalities, of extractionism, of exploitation, that is something that people built and they wanted it to be and work exactly the way it is working.”  
- Wolfgang Obenland, *NGO Forum on the Environment and Development*, **Germany**

Many of the VNRs delivered by representatives of SIDS and LDCs, as well as the sessions dedicated to these countries, elaborated that LDCs and SIDS have faced major setbacks in achieving the SDGs and their own countries’ development goals, due heavily to the concurrent crises of COVID-19 and climate change. Many of these countries produce very little emissions harmful to the environment, yet they are among the most vulnerable to flooding due to rising sea levels, droughts, torrential rains, and other climate disasters.

Many LDCs and SIDS have enacted laws and adopted plans to work towards gender equality. While progress has been made, the presentations by Guinea-Bissau and Liberia, for instance, named Female Genital Mutilation as a persistent hurdle toward achieving gender equality. These and other LDCs acknowledged that more work needs to be done to prioritize gender equality. Other developing countries stated that while achieving the SDGs remains a top priority, it is especially difficult for their governments to fund all the programmes necessary to work towards their achievement. As the midpoint for the 2030 Agenda approaches, the results of the mid-term review at the [2023 SDG Summit](#) will be critical to chart a correction course as well as adopt robust new measures and commitments.

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