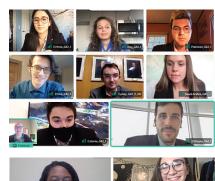# High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

Background Guide 2021

Written by: Vikram Sakia, Director;
Seth Davis, Assistant Director; Zachary Parker, Director-IS

NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2021 National Model United Nations Conference in Washington, DC (NMUN•DC)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). This year's staff is: Director Vikram Sakkia and Assistant Director Seth Davis. Vikram holds an B.Sc. in Computer Engineering and is currently a graduate student at the New York University pursuing a Master's in Science in Computer Engineering. Seth works with a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that has consultative status under the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN. Seth holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science and Religious Studies from Alma College.

The topics under discussion for HLPF are:

    I.   SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in COVID-19 Recovery
   II.   Ensuring Responsive, Inclusive, Participatory, and Representative Decision-Making at All Levels

Established in 2012, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is an annual high-level meeting within the United Nations system that brings together Member States to discuss global development efforts and review global progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These high-level meetings support better cooperation and coordination within the United Nations on sustainable development programs and policies. A central component of the HLPF are the voluntary national reviews (VNRs), which Member States submit to outline their national contributions to the SDGs. These VNRs, and the HLPF more broadly, can lead to partnerships with domestic and international partners to address pressing global challenges.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to conduct additional research, explore your Member State's policies in-depth, and examine the policies of other Member States to improve your ability to negotiate and reach consensus. In preparation for the conference, each delegation will use their research to draft and submit a position paper. Guidelines are available in the NMUN Position Paper Guide.

The NMUN website has many additional resources, including two that are essential both in preparation for the conference and as a resource during the conference. They are:
1. The NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide, which explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-Conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions. Delegates should not discuss the topics or agenda with other members of their committee until the first committee session.
2. The NMUN Rules of Procedure, which includes the long and short form of the rules as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory NMUN Conduct Expectations on the NMUN website. They include the conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the conference itself, please contact the Under-Secretary-General Chris Duggan at usgchris.dc@nmun.org or Secretary-General Courtney Indart at secgen.dc@nmun.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the conference!

Sincerely,
Vikram Sakkia, Director
Seth Davis, Assistant Director

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Committee Overview

Introduction

In 1987, The World Commission on Environment and Development, presented a new concept to frame multiple dimensions of future global development and the international community started working on a compromise on how to implement sustainable development across the globe.[1] Still, it took several years until the outcome document of the United Nations (UN) Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), *The Future We Want* (2012), finally delineated the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental.[2] These steps were milestones on the path towards the adoption of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda) (2015), and the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).[3]

In 1992, following the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the UN General Assembly established HLPF's predecessor, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), to monitor the outputs of UNCED.[4] The CSD was responsible for keeping sustainable development a key discussion point, coordinating the sharing of knowledge and best practices to achieve global sustainable development, and for reviewing the implementation of UNCED recommendations.[5] However, stakeholders from all three dimensions of sustainable development were not sufficiently included in policy decisions and several representatives, particularly from the Global South and from developing Member States, had insufficient funding to allow them to participate in the integration of the three dimensions of sustainability.[6] Furthermore, although the work of the CSD was based on a multi-year program which facilitated preparation for the meetings, Member States felt that it prevented discussion on new and emerging global issues.[7] Nevertheless, among its most notable achievements, the actions of the CSD demonstrated the vital importance of a structure that gathered all stakeholders, including representatives from indigenous peoples, and children and youth, that actively reviewed global progress toward sustainable development.[8]

In 2012, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) established the HLPF to build on the experience of CSD and replace it.[9] The purpose of the HLPF was to "follow up on the implementation of sustainable development and […] avoid overlap with existing structures, bodies and entities in a cost-effective manner."[10] In 2015, the General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda, including the 17 SDGs and 169 associated targets.[11] The SDGs address topics including good health and wellbeing (Goal 3), reduced inequalities (Goal 10), and global partnership for the goals (Goal 17).[12] The 2030 Agenda thus introduced a new era of international dialogue and partnership for fostering and facilitating all three dimensions of sustainable development.[13]

Governance, Structure, and Membership

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[1] ILO, *Newsletter October 12, No. 32*, 2012; UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – United Nations System*; UN General Assembly, *The Future We Want (A/RES/66/288)*, 2012.

[2] Ibid.

[3] UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – United Nations System*.

[4] UN DESA, *Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)*, 2016.

[5] UN DESA, *About the CSD*; UN General Assembly, *Institutional Arrangements to follow up the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (A/RES/47/191)*, 1993.

[6] UN General Assembly, *Lessons learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development: Report of the Secretary-General (A/67/757)*, 2012.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – United Nations System*.

[10] UN General Assembly, *The Future We Want (A/RES/66/288)*, 2012, p. 16.

[11] UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – United Nations System*.

[12] UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

[13] Ibid.

HLPF meets in two different formats: once every four years under the auspices of the UN General Assembly starting in 2013, and once every year under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) starting in 2014.[14] When they meet under the auspices of the UN General Assembly, heads of state and government officials provide political guidance on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and discuss emerging challenges.[15] At the end of the meeting, HLPF adopts an international declaration on sustainable development, which is ultimately submitted to the General Assembly.[16] Under the auspices of ECOSOC, Member States, UN system entities, civil society representatives, and other stakeholders meet annually to discuss the progress on the 2030 Agenda under thematic reviews, including updates on country progress on the SDGs through Voluntary National Reviews.[17] Therefore, while the meetings are held through the UN General Assembly focus on basic progress with the SDGs, those convened through ECOSOC follow respective themes determined by the UN General Assembly and concentrate on a particular subset of SDGs.[18] These meetings are followed by a meeting attended by ministers and other government officials who work in different relevant departments, such as environment or foreign affairs.[19] The forum also conducts voluntary reviews on the follow-up and implementation of the 2030 Agenda in all Member States.[20] Recent themes include "Transformation Towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies" in 2019, and "Accelerated Action and Transformation Pathways: Realizing the Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development" in 2020.[21]

All Member States and specialized agencies take part to find a consensus.[22] The Forum's work is funded through a voluntary trust fund, which includes remaining funds from the Trust Fund for Support of the Work of CSD, as well as voluntary contributions from Member States.[23] The Fund is exclusively dedicated to facilitate the participation of developing countries and to support the preparation of the Forum.[24] Following the lessons learned from the CSD on the financial incapacity of some Member States, the Forum's financial resources are oriented to ensure the participation of least developed countries and representatives of major groups in the Forum's meetings.[25] The budget ensures that the body has sufficient financial resources to prepare for and conduct its sessions.[26] Inside the UN system, the UN Division for Sustainable Development, which is part of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), provides substantive and administrative support to HLPF.[27]

[14] UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform - High-Level Political Forum 2013*; UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform - High-Level Political Forum 2014*; UN DGC, *New High-level Political Forum Starts Work to Reinvigorate and Accelerate Sustainable Development Action*, 2013.

[15] UN DGC, *New High-level Political Forum Starts Work to Reinvigorate and Accelerate Sustainable Development Action*, 2013; UN General Assembly, *Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (A/RES/67/290)*, 2013, p. 3.

[16] UN DGC, *New High-level Political Forum Starts Work to Reinvigorate and Accelerate Sustainable Development Action*, 2013.

[17] Ibid; UN General Assembly, *Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (A/RES/67/290)*, 2013, p. 3-4.

[18] Martens, The HLPF 2016: First global meeting on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, Global Policy Watch, 2016.

[19] UN DGC, *Adoption of Declaration Commits Ministers to Leaving No One Behind in Implementing Sustainable Development Agenda, as High-Level Political Forum Concludes (ECOSOC/6790)*, 2016; UN DPI, *New High-level Political Forum Starts Work to Reinvigorate and Accelerate Sustainable Development Action*, 2013; UN General Assembly, *Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (A/RES/67/290)*, 2013, p. 4.

[20] Ibid, p. 4.

[21] UN DESA, Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – *High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*.

[22] UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – States Members of the United Nations and States Members of Specialized Agencies*; UN General Assembly, *Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (A/RES/67/290)*, 2013, p. 3.

[23] UN General Assembly, *Format and Organizational Aspects of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (A/RES/67/290)*, 2013.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] UN DESA, *Division for Sustainable Development Goals*.

Mandate, Functions, and Powers

Overall, the mandate of the HLPF is to provide political leadership, guidance, and recommendations at all levels to all stakeholders in a holistic approach to follow up on and review progress towards the implementation of sustainable development commitments.[28] The HLPF promotes the integration of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in an action-oriented agenda and considers new and emerging issues.[29] This means that topics relating to a social policy should also include environmental and economic dimensions, and vice versa.[30] These three dimensions are imperative in ensuring action is made towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[31] In general, the Forum is mandated to facilitate knowledge-sharing and lessons learned between all stakeholders, and to support and assess regular Voluntary National Reviews conducted by Member States.[32] Since 2016, 168 Member States have submitted Voluntary National Reviews of their efforts toward the implementation of the SDGs, with 47 new country reports having been presented during the 2020 session of the HLPF.[33] The HLPF first met in 2016 under the auspices of the ECOSOC following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda.[34] During the forum, government representatives and relevant stakeholders discussed means for "ensuring that no one is left behind" and set the first steps toward a globally inclusive implementation of the 2030 Agenda.[35] Ministers acknowledged that groups such as communities in rural areas, women, and youth are at risk of not benefiting from upcoming initiatives for global sustainable development and that collecting quality data and including vulnerable groups in decision-making processes is necessary for the achievement of the SDGs.[36]

Parallel to the HLPF, the UN Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) supports Member States "in planning and implementing sustainable development strategies, notably through knowledge-sharing, research, training and partnerships."[37] While it shares some areas of expertise with HLPF, UNOSD focuses on providing Member States with concrete support, while HLPF monitors the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.[38] UN DESA fosters international cooperation for sustainable development and builds on the 2030 Agenda while providing "analytical products, policy advice and technical assistance" to Member States and the public.[39]

With the support of ECOSOC, HLPF also promotes technology and knowledge-sharing in order to achieve sustainable development and improve cooperation and coordination inside the UN.[40] The HLPF also cooperates with the Development Cooperation Forum; is involved in regional preparatory processes for the implementation of sustainable development; and facilitates global partnerships for sustainable development.[41] Furthermore, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other organizations hold special rights to participate in the dialogue and contribute to HLPF's work, as they are permitted to attend

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[28] UN General Assembly, *Format and Organizational Aspects of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (A/RES/67/290)*, 2013, p. 3.

[29] Ibid.

[30] UN DESA, *Social Development for Sustainable Development*.

[31] Ibid.

[32] UN General Assembly, *Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (A/RES/67/290)*, 2013, p. 4.

[33] UN DESA, *2020 Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report*.

[34] UN ECOSOC, *Ministerial Declaration of the 2016 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, Convened Under the Auspices of the Economic and Social Council, on the theme "Ensuring that no one is Left Behind" (E/HLS/2016/1)*, 2016.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid..

[37] UNOSD, *United Nations Office for Sustainable Development*.

[38] Ibid.

[39] UN DESA, *Who we Are*.

[40] UN General Assembly, *Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (A/RES/67/290)*, 2013, p. 4.

[41] Ibid.

and even participate in official meetings.[42] The Forum also works closely with governments and civil society.[43]

Recent Sessions and Current Priorities

In July 2019, the HLPF met under the auspices of ECOSOC to discuss "empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality."[44] UN officials recognized that the most vulnerable people and Member States will suffer the most when facing global challenges and shared concerns on rising inequalities that undermine social cohesion and prosperity.[45] This same year, the HLPF also met under the auspices of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly at the SDG Summit in September 2019.[46] For the first time, heads of state and government convened to review the progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and to discuss results based on the Global Sustainable Development Report 2019.[47]

The 2020 session, met under the theme of: "Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development."[48] However due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this session was held virtually, in which 18 informational sessions took place to discuss the progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as hearing the presentations of 47 Member States voluntary national reviews.[49] Discussions took place under four specific areas: keeping the SDGs in focus while combatting COVID-19; building back better following COVID-19, including where to make the most progress towards the SDGs; realizing the SDGs and response to COVID-19 in African countries, least developed countries, and landlocked countries; and "means for implementation to match the scope of the crisis and the breadth of ambition for 2030."[50] In the 2020 Report of the Secretary-General on Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals, he highlighted the urgency of the goals, the impacts of COVID-19 on the progress of the goals, the poorest and most vulnerable people being disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, the effects on critical operations including data gathering challenges, and the importance of protecting prior successes of the goals before COVID-19 pandemic began.[51] In 2020, a number of important issues were discussed under the theme including that of various marginalized groups such as women, LGBTQIA persons, and the ageing population.[52] A number of recommendations also were released under the Together 2030 platform on: human well-being and capabilities; sustainable and just economies; food systems and nutritional patterns; energy decarbonization and universal access; urban and peri-urban development; and global environmental commons."[53]

The upcoming 2021 session of the HLPF will continue to focus on sustainable development through a lens of COVID-19 under the theme of: "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of

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[42] Ibid, p. 4.
[43] Ibid.
[44] UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – High-Level Political Forum 2019 Under the Auspices of ECOSOC*.
[45] UN News, *Inclusion, Empowerment and Equality, Must be 'at the Heart of our Efforts' to Ensure Sustainable Development, says UN chief*, 2019.
[46] UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – SDG Summit*.
[47] Ibid.
[48] UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*.
[49] HLPF, *Report of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Convened Under the Auspices of the Economic and Social Council at its 2020 session*, 2020.
[50] Ibid, pp. 5-14.
[51] UN ECOSOC, *Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals Report of the Secretary-General (E/2020/57)*, 2020, pp. 2-3.
[52] UN ECOSOC, *Discussion Papers on the Theme of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, Submitted by Major Groups and Other Stakeholders*, 2020.
[53] Ibid, pp. 17-18.

action and delivery for sustainable development."[54] Specifically, discussion will center around Goal 1, no poverty; Goal 2, zero hunger; Goal 3, good health and well-being; Goal 8, decent work and economic growth; Goal 13, climate action; and Goal 17, partnerships for the goals.[55] The session's provisional agenda includes review of various regional progress reports, voluntary national reviews, discussions with major groups and stakeholders, and various reports of the Secretary-General, and ECOSOC.[56]

Conclusion

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the HLPF has become the primary institution to conduct follow-up and review of the progress made by the UN and Member States to implement all three dimensions of sustainable development.[57] Tremendous challenges and obstacles to establish cooperation and build partnerships, including ensuring discussions are made by including all persons affected by the goals, and are ultimately connected to the 2030 Agenda, making HLPF one of the most important political forums for a better future for the entire planet.[58] Its inclusive membership and openness to the participation of civil society make HLPF a key forum for building consensus to implement the SDGs and raise awareness for sustainable development.[59]

Annotated Bibliography

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (n.d.). *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*. Retrieved 19 March 2021 from: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf
> *The Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, which is the official resource on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, provides specific information on HLPF. By explaining the Forum's history, mandate, structure, and governance, it constitutes a useful resource for delegates to delve into the topic. The website further summarizes information on past and upcoming sessions of HLPF and provides an overview of recently discussed issues. It helps delegates to keep track of HLPF's work and agenda and it helps them to understand the mandate, functions, and powers of the committee.*

United Nations, Economic and Social Council. (2020). *Discussion papers on the Theme of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, Submitted by Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (E/HLPF/2020/2)*. Retrieved 19 March 2021 from: https://undocs.org/e/hlpf/2020/2
> *As one of the most recent summary documents of the 2020 session of the HLPF, delegates will find this document useful in understanding current state of both the HLPF's priorities and progress being made towards the sustainable development goals. This document goes into detail on a number of cross-cutting issues like education, women, and persons with disabilities, and goes beyond just giving a summary of the goals progress, but rather uses the issues and relates them to the goals. Delegates will also gain value from this document in understanding how the HLPF formulates and structures its discussions.*

United Nations, Economic and Social Council. (2020). *Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals Report of the Secretary-General (E/2020/57)*. Retrieved 19 March 2021 from: https://undocs.org/en/E/2020/57

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[54] UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – High-Level Political Forum 2021 Under the Auspices of ECOSOC.*

[55] Ibid.

[56] UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – Documentation*.

[57] UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – United Nations System*.

[58] Ibid.

[59] UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – States Members of the United Nations and States Members of Specialized Agencies*; UN General Assembly, *Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (A/RES/67/290)*, 2013, p. 3.

In the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) progress report, a summary by SDG is provided that will give delegates a good understanding of the current state of each goal, including recent impacts such as COVID-19. This report includes a number of statistics and relates to the goals and targets, which will help delegates better understand the current progress, as well as the challenges currently being faced. Each of the sections of goals includes a number of practical examples, which may help delegates develop new ways to approach current challenges.

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I. SDGs and the Agenda in COVID-19 Recovery

Introduction

In 2020, the world faced a global threat in the form of the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, which is responsible for the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and has lead to a global pandemic.[60] The first case was reported in the province of Wuhan within the People's Republic of China, but has since spread throughout the international community.[61] The COVID-19 outbreak has affected nearly every single Member State, inflicting 20% of cases with severe or critical symptoms with a case fatality rate of over 1%.[62] The COVID-19 pandemic has affected more than the health systems of the world, afflicting the economic, humanitarian, security, and human rights sectors as well.[63] The United Nations (UN) has recognized the "immediate and dreadful" impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with Secretary-General António Guterres noting that the virus does not respect national boundaries.[64]

The pandemic is seen as a wake-up call by exposing the shortcomings in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 70/1, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda).[65] The UN Department of Public Information notes that the call for action requires the suppression of the transmission of the virus while simultaneously tackling the social and economic dimensions of the crisis.[66] The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) maintains a central role in following-up and reviewing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda.[67] The SDGs play an essential role in shaping the future of development across all sectors tackling global challenges such as equal employment opportunities, climate change, and equal access to healthcare; all of which are sectors that have been negatively impacted by COVID-19.[68]

The economic challenges have been made apparent due to the loss of 400 million jobs worldwide over 2020, resulting in a sharp per-capita decline in income across Member States.[69] These losses have pushed people into extreme poverty leading to further issues such as food and water insecurity along with an inability to access healthcare.[70] At the 2020 HLPF on Sustainable Development opening, Secretary-General António Guterres remarked that some of the key themes affected by COVID-19 are universal health coverage, quality education, social protection, safe water and sanitation relating to SDGs that have not had adequate investment in their resilience.[71]

International and Regional Framework

The impact of pandemics on societies, political systems, and economies as a national threat grew to prominence in the 1990s with the World Health Assembly (WHA) revising the existing International Health Regulations (IHR) in 1995 to improve the response of the international community to a potential threat.[72] The IHR provides an overarching legal framework in defining Member States' rights and obligations in dealing with public health emergencies.[73] This was further revised in 2005 to provide core requirements

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[60] UN DPI, COVID-19 pandemic, an 'unprecedented wake-up call' for all inhabitants of Mother Earth, 2020.

[61] WHO, *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19: Q&A)*, 2020.

[62] UN DPI, *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19*, 2020.

[63] United Nations, *United Nations Comprehensive Response to COVID-19*, 2020.

[64] UN DPI, COVID-19 pandemic, an 'unprecedented wake-up call' for all inhabitants of Mother Earth, 2020.

[65] UN, *The Sustainable Development Goals: Our Framework for COVID-19 Recovery*, 2020.

[66] UN DPI, *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19*, 2020.

[67] UN, *High-Level Political Forum*, 2020.

[68] UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

[69] UN, *Impacts of COVID-19 Crisis Due to Past, Present Failures, Secretary-General Tells High-Level Political Forum, Stressing 'We Must Rise to Meet the Moment'*, 2020.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] UN Chronicle, *National Security and Pandemics*, 2020.

[73] WHO, *International Health Regulations: Overview*. 2021.

for all signatory States in order to prevent and contain public health emergencies.[74] The IHR has now been signed by 196 States, including all 194 Member States of the WHO.[75] The IHR requires Member States to designate a National IHR Focal Point (NFP) to communicate with the WHO regarding any potential threats and provides information catering towards SDG 3.[76] The implementation of the IHR has established a global standard for responding to pandemics, there are still technical and political challenges present in achieving the ideal response to a threat.[77]

In 2015, the 2030 Agenda focusing on themes such as universal healthcare, quality education, social protection, and food and water security, which have all been adversely effected by the COVID-19 pandemic.[78] The SDGs set by the 2030 Agenda are detailed and cover a variety of issues including no poverty, zero hunger, good-health and well-being; set as Targets 1,2, and 3 respectively.[79] Periodically the UN publishes reports or briefs on the status of these goals, and having completed five years under the 2030 Agenda, the SDG summit in 2019, lead to a revision of the ultimate timeline.[80] This was then further disrupted in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In August 2020, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) released *Policy Brief #81* that included the statistics of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SDGs.[81] This brief detailed the extent of the economic recession caused by COVID-19 implicating that it has led to an expected 4.2% decline in GDP per capita on average for Member States.[82]

The European Union (EU) published a recovery plan in 2020 that outlined several steps towards facilitating the SDGs during COVID-19 recovery.[83] The recovery plan is a dynamically evolving one, with an agenda to focus efforts into predominantly the SDG 3 on health and SDGs 1 and 8 on economic growth and employment.[84] The sustainable recovery of the economy results in an indirect approach towards the SDGs and the EU has emphasized that other regions begin to formulate updated strategies due to the massive disruption caused by COVID-19.[85]

Role of the International System

This global threat to health security underscores the urgent need to accelerate progress on achieving SDG 3, particularly SDG 3.D, which calls for improving early warning systems for global health risks, as well as reduction and management of such risks.[86] The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) jointly organized a virtual event that addressed how the pandemic is impacting the SDGs, specifically SDG 9, pertaining to Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, and SDG 17, pertaining to revitalizing global partnerships.[87] The SDSN emphasized long-term planning with support from science, engineering, and public policy towards targeted checkpoints based on the SDGs to ensure that a framework for the COVID-19 Pandemic recovery was monitored.[88]

The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) provides a knowledge hub for the SDGs by

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[74] UN Chronicle, *National Security and Pandemics*, 2020.

[75] Ibid.

[76] WHO, *International Health Regulations: Overview*. 2021.

[77] UN Chronicle, *National Security and Pandemics*, 2020.

[78] UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

[79] Ibid.

[80] UN DESA, *Policy Brief #81: Impact of COVID-19 on SDG progress: a statistical perspective*, 2020.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

[83] EU Science Hub, *A sustainable recovery for the EU*, 2020.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

[86] UN Women, *Will the Pandemic Derail Hard-Won Progress on Gender Equality?*, 2020.

[87] UN SDSN, *Global collaboration is key to recovery and achieving the SDGs*, 2020; UNCTAD, *Response and Recovery: Mobilising financial resources for development in the time of Covid-19*, 2020.

[88] UN SDSN, *Using the Sustainable Development Goals to guide the COVID-19 recovery*, 2020.

summarizing the information gleaned and provides insight for Member States to follow towards sustainability and resilience.[89] The organization works independently from the UN and provides professional feedback, such as scientists from the IISD suggesting that working towards particular SDGs would have decreased the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and furthered the progress towards the 2030 Agenda.[90]

In 2020, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) held the *3rd OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the SDGs* that focused on utilizing the SDGs as a framework for long-term COVID-19 recovery strategies in cities and regions.[91] The 3rd Roundtable by the OECD established recovery strategies by sharing lessons and showcasing success stories from local and regional political leaders and stakeholders.[92] Furthermore, for the Latin American and Caribbean regions, the Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC) launched report on the necessity for a new global and regional compact along with a special report on the economic autonomy of women in the post-pandemic recovery.[93] The ECLAC also launched a COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean in order to review and follow-up on economic and social impacts that the policies have at national and regional levels.[94]

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducts studies on socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and has noted that without any initiatives it would drive the number of people living in extreme poverty to 1 billion by 2030.[95] In 2019, the UN DESA recognized that partnerships are essential towards supporting the SDGs and established the 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator in collaboration with the UNDP.[96] The objective of the Partnership Accelerator includes supporting country driven partnerships for public platforms drawing out best practices and building partnerships skills and competencies by enabling stakeholders to develop policy, strategy, systems, legal agreements, and culture to further support collaboration.[97]

The World Health Organization (WHO) is leading the multilateral effort to suppress transmission and stop the pandemic by leading the scientific collaboration towards effective vaccines and therapeutics.[98] The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has also reassessed the growth of the economy for 2020 and 2021, declaring that the global economy is in a worse recession than in 2009.[99] While in the private sector, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has provided a detailed outlook on the future of large private organizations and the necessary steps to be taken in order to sustainably facilitate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.[100] The ILO has indicated that implementing new programs to support enterprises, jobs, and incomes to restructure the labor and social protection institutions would advance strategies to provide longer-term guarantees and create a comprehensive employment policy to recover from the effect of the pandemic.[101]

HLPF is set to meet from 13-15 July 2021 as part of the high-level segment within the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) with the theme of "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development:

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[89] IISD, *Three SDG Logics for Transformation Beyond COVID-19*, 2020.

[90] Ibid.

[91] OECD, *3rd OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, 2020.

[92] Ibid.

[93] ECLAC, *Fulfilling the 2030 Agenda in the Post COVID-19 World Will Necessitate a New Global and Regional Compact: ECLAC*, 2020; ECLAC, *ECLAC Will Launch Special Report COVID-19 on the Economic Autonomy of Women in the Post-Pandemic Recovery*, 2020.

[94] Ibid.

[95] UNDP, *Impact of COVID-19 on the Sustainable Development Goals*, 2020.

[96] UN DESA, *The 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator*, 2020.

[97] Ibid.

[98] WHO, *COVID-19 and sustainable development goals*, 2020.

[99] UN DPI, *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19*, 2020.

[100] ILO, *Impact on the labour market and income in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2020.

[101] Ibid.

building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development".[102]

Sustainable Solutions to Cope with the Impacts

Having affected nearly every single Member State in the world, COVID-19 requires a response from every Member State locally, regionally, and internationally.[103] While the appropriate response varies from Member State to Member State, requiring general measures such as physical distancing, quarantining, testing, and contact tracing are essential to further limit the spread of SARS-CoV-2.[104] An ongoing pandemic requires ongoing measures to suppress the transmission of the virus as quickly as possible to stop the pandemic requiring divisive, urgent, and coordinated action by all political leaders and stakeholders.[105] For tackling a pandemic of this scale the UN recommends acting early and decisively, strengthening the resilience of health systems, providing support to countries with weaker healthcare systems, enabling free and immediate access to research, and challenging business corporations to step up matching the contributions by philanthropies.[106]

HLPF advises Member States to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of the progress made at national-level voluntarily through VNRs.[107] These VNRs are compiled and submitted by Member States voluntarily in conjunction with information gathered from local, regional, and international agencies.[108] These reviews aim to establish the sharing of experiences and challenges that could be integrated with other organizations as well.[109] HLPF keeps these documents available publicly, establishing a widely used VNR database.[110] The database provides up-to-date information regarding policies implemented by Member States in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.[111] In 2020, 39 out of 46 submitted VNRs presented at HLPF explicitly mentioned the impact of the pandemic on SDG implementation.[112] Steps toward sustainable, zero waste initiatives have taken a hit due to COVID-19.[113] However, the COVID-19 pandemic has also brought to light several creative projects and ideas that can be implemented towards the responsible consumption and production goal of SDG 12.[114] HLPF has sought additional information towards sustainable production and consumption from the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) that have been submitted.[115] These VNRs detail public and private organizations rapidly responding to key factors such as: disposing of waste properly, utilizing sustainable modes of transportation, saving energy and water, limiting purchases to consolidate deliveries, trying sustainable sources of food, and engaging in environmental justice by supporting sustainable options.[116]

As indicated by the UN Department of Public Information, the overarching principle of sustainable solutions involve keeping people, households, and businesses afloat by focusing economic policies.[117] Economic policies should meet immediate health, food, and shelter needs, protecting social cohesion and maintaining the political and economic stability.[118] One of the largest necessary areas of growth due to COVID-19 was the requirement for masks, disposable personal protective equipment, and disposable

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[102] UN, *High-Level Political Forum 2021 Under the Auspices of ECOSOC*, 2021.
[103] UN DPI, *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19*, 2020.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] HLPF, *Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews*, 2021.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] UN DESA, *Policy Brief #85: Impact of COVID-19: perspective from Voluntary National Reviews*, 2020.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Zero Waste Europe, *New reusable and sustainable solutions in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic*, 2020.
[114] Ibid.
[115] UN DESA, *Policy Brief #85: Impact of COVID-19: perspective from Voluntary National Reviews*, 2020.
[116] Berkeley Sustainability & Carbon Solutions, *Staying Environmentally Sustainable - COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery*, 2020.
[117] UN DPI, *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19*, 2020.
[118] Ibid.

equipment across various sectors.[119] The need for higher levels of hygiene resulted in more disposable equipment.[120] Nonetheless, further suggestions for sustainably produced and reusable equipment across sectors persist, especially within the healthcare sector.[121]

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has drawn attention to the COVID-19 pandemic's ability to highlight the unsustainable practices in production, consumption, and distribution of food and water.[122] Agriculture is an important sector in ASEAN providing not only a source of food and nutritional security but also employment in the rural population.[123] The disruptions in the supply chain due to restricted movement and limited transportation has shed light on the need to prioritize sustainable agriculture and strengthen the supply chain.[124] ASEAN has previously shared resources on Good Agricultural Practices, Good Aquaculture Practices, and climate-smart agriculture in building high-value food industries to increase the value for agricultural products and the income for agricultural workers.[125]

Partnerships to Accelerate the Global Response to COVID-19

Global collaboration through a holistic approach is required to create structural changes across society in order to combat the pandemic.[126] The 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator provides a great insight as to how partnerships have been used in the past to accelerate the progress towards the 2030 Agenda.[127] The UN DESA report on partnerships in response to COVID-19 includes partnerships of three main types: public-private, public-civil society, and private-civil society.[128] It indicates that although partnerships usually take time to develop, in the event of the pandemic, partnerships were built rapidly in a few weeks or months.[129]

The first point of contact would be to work with local and national authorities that stand at the frontline of the pandemic.[130] The capacity of local governments require assistance due to the sheer numbers and financial limitations of national healthcare services.[131] The research community requires partnerships to share information and accelerate the production of key medical materials, tests, and medications.[132]

The Human Rights Council (HRC) has organized three intersessional meetings to identify agencies, funds, and additional mechanisms to aid Member States.[133] The ILO has detailed steps that need to be taken towards reintegrating the 400 million lost jobs over the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, back into the regular workforce.[134] These steps must be integrated with Member States or regional authorities in mind, to appropriately employ them towards sustainable development of the relevant industry.[135]

The VNRs compiled by the HLPF detail the impact and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic of Member States.[136] The VNRs describe the health measures taken by the public and private sector to combat COVID-19, the socio-economic impact of the pandemic and the roles of public and private

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[119] Zero Waste Europe, *New reusable and sustainable solutions in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic*, 2020.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] ASEAN, *ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework*, 2020.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] UN SDSN, *Global collaboration is key to recovery and achieving the SDGs*, 2020.
[127] UN DESA, *The 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator*, 2020.
[128] UN DESA, *Partnerships in response to COVID-19: Building back better together*, 2021.
[129] Ibid.
[130] UN DPI, *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19*, 2020.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] OHCHR, *Promotion and protection of human rights and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/HRC/RES/43/19)*, 2020; OHCHR, *Building Back Better: Integrating Human Rights in Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic*, 2021.
[134] ILO, *Impact on the labour market and income in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2020.
[135] Ibid.
[136] UN DESA, *Policy Brief #85: Impact of COVID-19: perspective from Voluntary National Reviews*, 2020.

stakeholders in combatting COVID-19.[137] Many Member States are developing centralized national statistical systems to monitor the progress, using technology to improve data collection and analysis, improving accountability and accessibility by making information transparent, and mobilizing assistance from public private partnerships and other stakeholders.[138]

All these resources and information has led to some successful partnerships such as the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, which is a global collaboration bringing together governments, health organizations, scientists, and philanthropists to accelerate the development, production, and access to COVID-19 tests, treatments and vaccines.[139] It was initiated by WHO and brought in partners from the private sector and government to support the fast mobilization of tools to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.[140] Another example of a successful partnership comes from the private sector, with the Tencent Foundation, which has previously launched multiple partnerships between the private sector and NGOs or local governments.[141] In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Tencent Foundation launched and innovative online donation platform and other charitable fund-raising models, thereby sustaining their employment of online workers and also providing resources to NGOs and local governments.[142]

Conclusion

Every one of the 17 SDGs are crucial towards recovery during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, however the SDGs 1,2,3, and 8 are most imminently affected and deserve significant attention.[143] HLPF is mandated to consistently review the progress made globally, regionally, and locally to adapt or provide insights to other Member States, with VNRs playing an important role in establishing a effort sharing system.[144] HLPF has established suggestions and recommendations based on the impact of COVID-19 in the present and optimal recovery practices with the help of external organizations and Member States, setting up multiple databases to provide the best information possible.[145] The sustainable solutions towards dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic require further development to be as sustainable as possible.[146] Finally, developing partnerships towards the SDGs will be integral in the recovery process of the COVID-19 pandemic.[147]

Further Research

As delegates proceed with their research, they should consider the following questions: What mechanisms can be implemented to combat COVID-19 on a global, regional, or local level? How can effective capacity-building measures be implemented to lead to the socio-economic recovery process? What measures can be adopted to increase the assistance provided to the healthcare sector? How can environmentally conscious steps be taken towards the SDGs during and after the COVID-19 pandemic? In what way does technology and sustainable development play a role in the path to COVID-19 recovery? What is the best method to achieve international cooperation for information sharing toward a recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic?

[137] Ibid
[138] Ibid.
[139] UN DESA, *Partnerships in response to COVID-19: Building back better together*, 2021.
[140] WHO, *The Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator*, 2021.
[141] UN DESA, *Partnerships in response to COVID-19: Building back better together*, 2021.
[142] Ibid.
[143] UN Department of Public Information, *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19*, 2020.
[144] UN General Assembly, *Format and Organizational Aspects of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (A/RES/67/290),* 2013.
[145] Ibid.
[146] UN DPI, *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19*, 2020.
[147] ILO, *Impact on the labour market and income in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2020.

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> *The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development detailed the response required from cities and regions towards the sustainable development goals. This source outlines the details taken in the recovery phase utilizing the advice of political leaders and international experts on the matter. It advised taking the programs run in pilot cities to influence future steps that could be taken to reduce the transmission of the virus. Delegates may find useful information on what steps have been taken by Member States towards the SDGs.*

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https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_report_socio-economic_impact_of_covid19.pdf
> *The UN Department of Public Information passed a report through the Secretary-General in a response and recovery report. This report calls on everyone to act together to address this impact and lessen the blow to people. The report describes the speed and scale of the outbreak, the severity of cases, and the societal and economic disruption of COVID-19. Delegates will get a perfect idea on the scale and the solutions proposed by the UN moving forward.*

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> *This page provides the ideal starting point for all SDGs on their framework to recovery from the effects of COVID-19. This is available on the UN SDG page that provides an insight into how exactly each goal was affected and the risks that may cause years of change to revert. It details how the recovery fun would be used to make sure the SDGs are tried to set back on track to minimize the disruption due to COVID-19. Delegates will find this useful to see what the main areas of focus are on the track to recovery of the SDGs during the COVID-19 recovery phase.*

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https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/PB_85.pdf
> *This was the latest policy brief available on the impact of COVID-19 on SDGs. It provided valuable insight on the steps taken by Member States and the impact of Pandemic. This report provides a great insight on VNRs as well as it details the consistent reporting of Member States to HLPF, and the information gathered. Delegates will find this especially useful when trying to determine partnerships or working towards a particular goal.*

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II. Ensuring Responsive, Inclusive, Participatory, and Representative Decision-Making at All Levels

Introduction

Outlining a universal framework that guides development efforts through 2030, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted resolution 70/1, "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," (2030 Agenda) in establishing 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that seek to address global challenges like poverty, gender inequality, climate change, and economic development, among many others.[148] SDG 16 seeks to "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.[149] One specific target of this SDG is 16.7, which establishes the UN's mission to "Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels."[150] The UN Secretary-General António Guterres emphasizes the importance of this target and has recently stated that, "the key to reinvigorated and reimagined governance lies with truly meaningful participation of people and civil society in the decisions that affect their lives."[151] Similarly, this was echoed by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Michelle Bachelet, who mentioned that strengthening inclusive and effective participation is "a major asset to governments" and must include "marginalized and vulnerable groups."[152] To achieve these goals, the UN offers a variety of conferences and guidance to Members States, including access to the Economic and Social Council's (ECOSOC) annual High Level Political Forum (HLPF).[153]

Based on SDG target 16.7, the UN identifies four key areas to bolster decision-making processes in Member States.[154] The first is responsive decision-making which is defined as the extent to which people feel the political system allows them to have an influence on politics.[155] The second is inclusive participation in decision-making that aims to understand if people feel they have a say in what the government does.[156] The third type of decision-making is participatory decision-making that addresses the volume and level of engagement populations have in decision-making, as well as how decision-makers cultivate a shared sense of responsibility.[157] Participation in the decision-making process has been associated with a range of positive effects in development, humanitarian aid and poverty reduction programs, notably better assessment of needs and capacities, and improvements in implementation, and sustainability.[158] Finally when there is representation in decision-making, the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes that people feel closer to policy and elected representatives because they more closely resemble them.[159] This representation may come in many forms, including varied political affiliation, age, sex, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or geographical location.[160]

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[148] UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid.

[151] UN, *Inclusion and More Public Participation*, *Will Help Forge Better Government Policies*, 2020.

[152] OHCHR, *High-Level Side Event: Participation*, *Human Rights and the Governance Challenge Ahead: Statement by Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights*, 2020.

[153] UN, *High-Level Political Forum 2021 Under the Auspices of ECOSOC*.

[154] UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

[155] UN Statistics, Indicator 16.7.2 Metadata, 2020, p. 1.

[156] Ibid.

[157] K, Sam, et al., *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making: Second Edition)*, 2007, p. xix.

[158] UN DESA, *Stakeholder Engagement & The 2030 Agenda*, 2020, p. 30.

[159] Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Trust and Public Policy: How Better Governance Can Help Rebuild Public Trust*, 2017.

[160] UN Women, *Global Norms and Standards: Leadership and Political Participation*, 2021.

Decision-making takes place at all levels of governance, including at the international, regional, national, local, and grassroots levels.[161] To promote this, the UN has included four additional SDG targets related to participation in decision-making.[162] Target 5.5 calls for "women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life."[163] Target 6.b states the need to "support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management."[164] Target 11.3 guides Member States towards "inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management."[165] In addition, Target 17.17 encourages and promotes "effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships" to streamline development efforts.[166]

International and Regional Framework

The principles of decision-making documented across multiple United Nations human rights frameworks outline the right to participate in public affairs and the rights to freedom of expression, information and association.[167] One example includes the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, which states in Article 21.1 that all citizens are entitled to take part in their governmental processes directly or through freely chosen representatives.[168] Since the adoption of the UDHR, the General Assembly has worked to promote equality in decision-making through adoption of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous* Peoples (UNDRIP), and *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (ICERD).[169] Article 7.b of CEDAW highlights that women have the rights to both engage in the creation of government policy and assume leadership roles at all levels of government.[170] Article 18 of UNDRIP outlines Indigenous Peoples' right to engage in decision-making processes that affect them..[171] Article 5.c of ICERD states that citizens have the right to engage in all level of policymaking.[172] In addition, Agenda 21, a comprehensive action plan to achieve environmental priorities at the local, national, and international levels, was established by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 and aimed to build upon these human rights standards to prioritize pathways for engaging Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) at the UN.[173] The parties included in MGoS include women, children and youth, farmers, indigenous peoples, local authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), scientific and technological communities, business and industry, persons with disabilities, volunteers, the ageing, and education and academia.[174]

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the UN continues to share best practices for inclusive and participatory decision-making processes through Member States' submissions of Voluntary National Reviews (VNR).[175] As a part of the HLFP process, VNRs allow Member States to describe lessons learned in their countries that have been successful in mobilizing support and partnerships for the implementation of the SDGs at national and sub-national levels.[176] Beyond HLPF, the UN Security Council has offered guidance on increasing inclusive representation in decision-making through adopted Security Council resolution 2250, "Youth, Peace & Security," which urges Member States to consider

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[161] UN, *Decisions by Topic: Information for Integrated Decision-Making & Participation*, 2021.
[162] UN DESA, *Stakeholder Engagement & The 2030 Agenda*, 2020, p. 26.
[163] UN Statistics, *Indicator 5.5.1(1) Metadata*, 2020, p.1.
[164] UN Statistics, *Indicator 6.b.1 Metadata*, 2017, p.1.
[165] UN Statistics, *Indicator 11.3.2 Metadata*, 2018, p.1.
[166] UN Statistics, *Indicator 17.17.1 Metadata*, 2020, p.1.
[167] UN DESA, *Stakeholder Engagement & The 2030 Agenda*, 2020, p. 28.
[168] UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III)*, 1948.
[169] UN DESA, *Stakeholder Engagement & The 2030 Agenda*, 2020, p. 28.
[170] UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Optional Protocol (A/RES/54/4)*, 1999.
[171] UN General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295)*, 2007.
[172] UN General Assembly, *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (A/RES/2106 (XX))*, 1965.
[173] UNCED, *Agenda 21*, 1992.
[174] UN, *Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS)*, 2021.
[175] UN, *Voluntary National Reviews*, 2021.
[176] Ibid.

ways of increasing representation of youth in decision-making at all levels in local, national, regional and international.[177] Most recently, the COVID-19 Pandemic has encouraged high-level discussions on a variety of topics related to inclusive decision-making, especially as it relates to women, persons with disabilities, indigenous populations, and youth.[178] In April 2020, the United Nations Secretary-General published a policy brief on *The Impact of COVID-19 on Women*, which calls for women's equal representation in all COVID-19 response planning and decision-making.[179] This brief emphasized that when policies do not consult women or include them in decision-making they are less effective and can even be harmful because they do not account for women's needs.[180] In May 2020, the UN published a policy brief to support a disability-inclusive response to COVID-19.[181] This policy brief highlights the importance of including persons with disabilities in decisions that affect their lives, as well as the need for access to disaggregated data to adequately monitor their inclusion in all phases of COVID-19 response and recovery.[182] Similarly, in May 2020, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) released policy brief #70 on *The Impact of COVID-19* on Indigenous Peoples, which highlights the need of including indigenous leaders in all COVID-19 measures that are affecting indigenous peoples.[183] In 2020, OECD called for the inclusion of youth in digital COVID-19 response initiatives, like hackathons, to give an intergenerational perspective and allow for new and innovative approaches during recovery efforts.[184]

Role of the International System

The HLPF focuses on achieving the SDGs by addressing the shortcomings of the UN system, promoting synergies, avoid duplication, and building off existing partnerships.[185] Since HLPF's inception, conference themes have included leaving no one is left behind, building resilient societies, and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.[186] Importantly, several objectives of the HLPF are to enhance evidence-based decision-making at all levels and contribute to strengthening ongoing capacity-building for data collection and analysis.[187] The UN achieves these objectives through engaging events; one example of an event was led by World Vision in 2019 and was titled *Illustrating the Power of Citizen Generated Data for Improved Public Service Delivery and SDG Accountability.*[188], The key outcome of this event was to demonstrate the importance of "non-official data", data generated by citizens, as a way to offer a more complex and accurate picture of progress at all levels.[189] In addition, HLPF hosts annual events dedicated to improving national data-driven reporting on VNRs Labs, like the *VNR Lab 14: Bridging the Policy-Statistics Gap: Strengthening the Use of Data for Evidence-Based VNRs.*[190]

UN organizations outside of ECOSOC also address improving decision-making at all levels. For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has emphasized Member States' role in leaving no one behind by ensuring inclusive representation in government, particularly for marginalized groups, and incorporating their needs and views into legislation.[191] This was demonstrated through a UNDP initiative where the Planning Institute of Jamaica worked with various disadvantaged communities, including

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[177] UN Security Council, *Resolution 2250 (2015)*, 2015, p. 3.
[178] UN, *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2020.
[179] UN, *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women*, 2020, p.3.
[180] Ibid.
[181] UN, *Policy Brief: A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19*, 2020, p. 9.
[182] Ibid.
[183] UN DESA, *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples*, 2020.
[184] OECD, *Youth and COVID-19: Response, Recovery and Resilience*, 2020.
[185] UN General Assembly, *Format and Organizational Aspects of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development* (A/RES/67/290), 2013.
[186] High-Level Political Forum, *HLPF Over the Years*, 2021.
[187] UN General Assembly, *The Future We Want (A/RES/66/288)*, 2012, p. 17.
[188] UN, *Other* Events; TAP Network, *Illustrating the Power of Citizen Generated Data for Improved Public Service Delivery and SDG Accountability*, 2019.
[189] World Vision, *Putting People at the Centre of the Data Revolution*, 2019, p. 5.
[190] UN, *VNR Lab 14: Bridging the Policy-Statistics Gap: Strengthening the Use of Data for Evidence-Based VNRs*, 2019.
[191] UNDP, *Institutional and Coordination Mechanisms: Guidance Note on Facilitating Integration and Coherence for SDG Implementation*, 2017, p. 10.

children, women, and people with disabilities, to understand progress on national priorities and the SDGs.[192] Additionally, UNESCO has elaborated on the need for participatory budgeting as a way to further show representation of indigenous groups, senior citizens, youth, LGBTQ+ persons, the homeless, and people with disabilities.[193] An example of participatory budgeting can be seen through an initiative by UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning in Lithuania where school children worked collaboratively with the school's administration and community members to propose ideas and vote on how public funding should be spent.[194]

Regionally, the African Union (AU) and African Development Bank are working with public authorities, private investors, domestic and foreign religious leaders, and family farmers to develop strategies and combat conflict related to land governance.[195] The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is working to create inclusive business models as a way to combat the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on businesses, as demonstrated by the recent *Guidance for the Promotion of Inclusive Business in ASEAN.*[196] Additionally, the Asia Development Alliance (ADA) called upon the private sector, and specifically industries that extract raw materials like oil, metals, and minerals from the Earth, or extractive industries, to uphold global standards and strive for inclusive decision-making for local and indigenous communities as way towards peace and sustainable development.[197] In Latin America and the Caribbean, national and regional leaders are interested in understanding how new technologies and social movements affect political participation and can be leveraged to increase safe election participation.[198]

Achieving SDG 5 through Responsive, Inclusive, Participatory, and Representative Leadership

The UN recognizes SDG 5, "Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls," as an important goal in ensuring sustainable development.[199] This is reiterated in SDG target 5.5 which aims to "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life."[200] The 2030 Agenda also calls upon Members States to "adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels" in target 5.c.[201] As of 1 January 2020, only 6.6% of heads of states, 6.2% of heads of government, and 20.5% of speakers of parliament were women.[202] Despite holding the highest offices in their governments, the Inter-Parliamentary Union documented that, 81.8% of women parliamentarians have been subjected to psychological violence, of which 44.4% stated that they have received threats of death, rape, beatings, or abductions.[203]

Most Member States do not have laws to prevent Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP), but the first to enact national legislation that provides two to five-year prison sentences for pressuring, persecuting, harassing, or threatening women for exercising public functions was Bolivia.[204] At a local level, Member States like Mexico are putting in place protocols for addressing gender-based political violence.[205] To address the issue at a global level, the UN convened on March 17, 2021, as a part of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to discuss *Violence Against Women in Politics: Experiences*

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[192] UN DESA, *Stakeholder Engagement & The 2030 Agenda*, 2020, p. 54.
[193] UNESCO, *UNESCO Analytical Framework for Inclusive Policy Design: Of Why, What and How*, 2015, p. 36.
[194] International Institute for Educational Planning, *Participatory Budgeting Initiatives Lead to Greater Transparency: Example of Two Lithuanian Schools*, 2019.
[195] International Land Coalition, *Inclusive Decision-Making*, 2021.
[196] ASEAN, *Guidelines for the Promotion of Inclusive Business in ASEAN*, 2020.
[197] Asia Development Alliance, *Ulaanbaatar Declaration on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies in Asia and Beyond (SDG 16+)*, 2019, p. 4.
[198] UN, *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2020, p. 22.
[199] UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid.
[202] UN Women, *Women in Politics: 2020*, 2020.
[203] Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Sexism, Harassment and Violence Against Women Parliamentarians*, 2016, p. 3.
[204] UN Women, *Expert Group Meeting Report: Violence Against Women in Politics*, 2018, p. 13.
[205] UNDP, *From Commitment to Action: Policies to End Violence Against Women in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2017.

and Ways Forward for Women Leaders.[206] This discussion fostered a space for UN agencies, national governments, and politicians to explore solutions and good practices for systematically addressing violence against women in politics.[207]

At a regional level, experts believe that the COVID-19 pandemic may pose as an opportunity to expand women's roles in transportation policy throughout Latin America.[208] The World Bank notes that since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, between 60% to 90% of Latin Americans have not used buses, subways, or trains because of confinement and social distancing measures.[209] In a recent survey of 5,010 commuters in Delhi, India, including 3,816 women, 50% of women said they were sexually harassed on public transport, while 42% reported being sexually harassed while waiting for public transport.[210] Considering safety is a major issue that disproportionately affects women and girls while using public transportations systems, placing women in leadership roles while there is reduced use of transport systems can support the adoption of policies that aim to overcome sexual harassment and violence women face when taking public transport.[211] To address similar issues, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, known as UN Women, has developed a course on *Gender Equality in Transportation* to demonstrate how women can be mobilized to create change sustainable change in the transport sector.[212] With increased safety measures on the agenda of governments, the World Bank's Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality (UFGE) also calls for boosting women's participation in decision-making on transport planning, monitoring, and evaluation to combat common unfair practices.[213] Doing so, UFGE argues there could be a reduction in violence against women when they are traveling alone or at night, along with combating other issues such as, price discrimination when trying to pay taxi fare.[214]

To call for the inclusion and safety of all women, the Yogyakarta Principles (YP+10) was adopted by members of academic institutions and the international community to emphasize the role individuals of all sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions or sex characteristics in public and political decision-making processes.[215] The YP+10 has not been formally adopted by the UN General Assembly but its principles have been included in General Assembly adopted resolution A/65/162 "Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education" in 2010.[216] As the leading UN body on issues related to LGBTQ+ persons, UN Free & Equal works with Member States, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) as a part of the UN Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Core Group (UN LGBTI).[217] In March 2021, the UN LGBTI Core Group spoke at the 65th Session of the CSW and highlighted how working towards women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life presents an opportunity to demonstrate the importance of including LGBT persons in high-level discussions.[218] Similarly, on International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia in March 2021, human rights experts urged Member States to account for the impact of COVID-19 on LGBTQ+ persons when designing, implementing, and evaluating

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[206] iKnowPolitics, *Violence Against Women in Politics: Experiences and Ways Forward for Women Leaders*, 2021.
[207] Ibid.
[208] World Bank, *COVID-19 Could Help Latin America Accelerate Toward More Inclusive Transport*, 2020.
[209] Ibid.
[210] USAID, *Gender-Based Violence on Public Transportation: A Review of Evidence and Existing Solutions*, 2020, p. 4.
[211] Ibid.
[212] UN Women, *Gender Equality in Transportation*, 2021.
[213] World Bank, *Why Does She Move? A Study of Women's Mobility in Latin American Cities*, 2020, p. 50.
[214] World Bank, *Why Does She Move? A Study of Women's Mobility in Latin American Cities*, 2020, p. 29.
[215] YP+10, *The Yogyakarta Principles (plus 10)*, 2017, p. 24.
[216] UN General Assembly, *Promotion and Protection of Human Rights: Human Rights Questions, Including Alternative Approaches for Improving the Effective Enjoyment of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, 2010, p. 7.
[217] UN Free & Equal, *2019 Annual Report*, 2019, p.15.
[218] UN LGBTI Core Group, *Statement Delivered on Behalf on LGBTI UN Core Group by North-Macedonia*, 2021.

the measures to combat the pandemic.[219] This is considering the lack of data, resource allocation, and support for LGBTQ+ persons in many Member States.[220]

Including Indigenous Leaders in High-Level Decisions

While Indigenous Peoples make up just 5% of the world's population, they account for about 15% of the extreme poor and have a life expectancy of up to 20 years lower than non-indigenous people worldwide.[221] Often without formal recognition of their lands, Indigenous People tend to be the last to receive public investments in basic services and infrastructure, and face barriers that make access to justice and participation in political processes and decision-making a challenge.[222] As it is related to measuring progress over time, all 17 SDGs are relevant for Indigenous Peoples, but only 2 out of 230 indicators specifically mention them.[223] Indicators 2.3.2 and 4.5.1, only reference Indigenous Peoples in the context of agriculture and education, limiting the extent to which data and information can be collected to understand and improve Indigenous communities' quality of life.[224] While the 2030 Agenda does not account for the diverse experiences, contexts, and aspirations of Indigenous Peoples, Article 79 encourages Member States to review national and sub-national levels progress by accounting for the contributions of SDG achievement by Indigenous Peoples.[225]

During the eighteenth session held in 2019 of the *UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues*, global experts stated that the inclusion of Indigenous leaders is pivotal to achieving the SDGs, especially to end poverty and adapt and mitigate to the effects of climate change.[226] The exploitation of non-renewable natural resources, including oil, gas, minerals, and timber by extractive industries is a key factor in triggering, escalating, or sustaining violent conflicts.[227] According to UN DESA, Indigenous communities have unique challenges that prevent them from being a part of high-level conversations, including displacement from their lands and territories due to extractives industries.[228] This is because local communities have been systematically excluded form decision-making processes.[229] As indicated by *The Indigenous World 2020*, nearly 500 Indigenous Peoples were killed since 2017 in just 19 countries for defending lands from large infrastructure, extractive, and energy projects.[230] Some Member States, like Nepal, are working at the national level to develop policy that will make decision-making more inclusive for Indigenous Peoples.[231]

Indigenous Peoples have largely been left out of decision-making processes during the COVID-19 pandemic which has created challenges in access to key resources such as personal protective equipment (PPE).[232] To address this, the Indigenous Peoples and Development Branch within the UN DESA met in December 2020 to discuss "Indigenous Peoples and Pandemics."[233] Considering Indigenous Peoples have been exposed to pandemics for centuries by outsiders, Indigenous leaders and organizations came together to discuss the absence of international frameworks and strategies designed

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[219] OHCHR, *COVID-19: The Suffering and Resilience of LGBT Persons Must Be Visible and Inform the Actions of States*, 2020.

[220] Ibid.

[221] World Bank, *Indigenous Peoples*, 2020.

[222] UNDP, *10 Things to Know About Indigenous Peoples*, 2017.

[223] UN, *Final List of Proposed Sustainable Development Goal Indicators*, 2016.

[224] Impakter, *Indigenous Peoples and the UN Sustainable Development Goals*, 2019.

[225] UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

[226] UN, *Indigenous Peoples Must be Part of High-Level Decision-Making, Speakers Stress, Calling for Observer Status in General Assembly, as Permanent Forum Continues*, 2019.

[227] UN Interagency Framework Team for Preventative Action, *Extractive Industries and Conflict: Toolkit and Guidance for Preventing and Managing Land and Natural Resources Conflict*, 2012, p. 6.

[228] UN Interagency Framework Team for Preventative Action, *Extractive Industries and Conflict: Toolkit and Guidance for Preventing and Managing Land and Natural Resources Conflict*, 2012, p. 16.

[229] Ibid.

[230] International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs, *The Indigenous World – 2020*, 2020, p. 12.

[231] International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs, *Indigenous Peoples in Nepal*, 2020.

[232] UN DESA, *EGM: Indigenous Peoples and Pandemics, 7-11 December 2020*, 2020.

[233] Ibid.

to address their specific needs.[234] These needs include the lack of presence in national decision-making processes and not having access to culturally appropriate information about the pandemic in their own languages.[235] Understanding this, the World Bank is working directly with Indigenous leaders in Panama to distribute protective gears and hygiene supplies to communities and build up capacity of health centers and hospitals in and around Indigenous territories.[236]

Conclusion

SDG target 16.7 seeks to "Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels."[237] While clear guidance is given to Member States on incorporating vulnerable groups in leadership and decision-making roles, populations like disabled persons, LGBTQ+ individuals, indigenous peoples, women, and youth are often excluded from these conversations.[238] Vulnerable populations have a major role to play in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals but it is up to Member States and the international community to elevate the voices of these populations, address the issues facing them, and work together toward a more sustainable future.[239]

Further Research

In their own research on Ensuring Responsive, Inclusive, Participatory, and Representative Decision-Making at All Levels, delegates should consider the following questions: What other challenges do vulnerable populations face that could be addressed through more holistic decision-making processes? Given the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, could other groups have supported in developing more comprehensive policy? What role can the HLPF play in facilitating discussions on decision-making at all levels? How can public and private partnerships be leveraged to support in Member States to strengthen decision-making?

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https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/publications/Indigenous/Handbook/EN.pdf
> *The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is a global organization of national parliaments working to promote peace and sustainable development. In support of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the IPU have developed a handbook for parliamentarians to ensure the inclusion of Indigenous leaders in decision-making processes. This source will help delegates find practical solutions towards the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in all levels of decision making.*

Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2016). *Sexism, Harassment and Violence Against Women Parliamentarians*. Retrieved 23 May 2021 from: http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/issuesbrief-e.pdf
> *The IPU documents key issues, concepts, and definitions related to violence women face at all levels of decision-making. With up-to-date statistics and global examples, the document offers a comprehensive analysis of the current status of sexism, harassment, and violence faced by women parliamentarians. This source will allow delegates to review the current situation and brainstorm practical solutions to overcome these obstacles.*

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[234] UN DESA, *International Expert Group Meeting on the theme Indigenous Peoples and Pandemics*, 2020, p. 3.
[235] Ibid.
[236] World Bank, *Indigenous Peoples*, 2020.
[237] UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.
[238] UN DESA, *Stakeholder Engagement & The 2030 Agenda*, 2020, p. 28.
[239] UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

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> *UNESCO designed this document to streamline policy thinking and to support qualitative analysis and design of inclusive policies at the country-level. With definitions and guiding information on how to be more inclusive in decision-making processes, UNESCO offers Member States a practice resource to expand decision-making in their countries. This source will enable delegates to reflect on their country's policies and learn how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be included in national and local governance.*

United Nations. (2020). *Policy Brief: A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19*. Retrieved 23 May 2021 from: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_on_persons_with_disabilities_final.pdf

> *The UN provides guidance on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the decisions that affect their lives. With examples from national governments, and experts the Policy Brief provides an analysis of the socio-economic impacts that COVID-19 has had on persons with disabilities. This source will help delegates understand why persons with disabilities are often left out of decision-making and highlights action that can be taken to be more representative going forward.*

United Nations, General Assembly, Third session. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*. Retrieved 23 May 2021 from: http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/

> *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights established the United Nations commitment to promote human, civil, economic, and social rights. This source outlines the rights that citizens of Member States should be entitled to, including the right to engage in governmental processes by themselves or through fairly elected officials. This source will enable delegates to understand the foundation of the UN's commitment to human rights and will allow for comparing and contrasting recent frameworks that have sought to expand civil, political, and social engagement in decision-making.*

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