

UNCTAD15 Civil Society Discussion Series
COVID-19 and Challenges for Financing for Development
7 April 2021 | 2 to 4.15 p.m. CET (Geneva time)

Concept Note

The UNCTAD14 conference in 2016 acknowledged that we had a long way to go in meeting global commitments to sustainable economic development and combating climate change. UNCTAD14 took place at a watershed moment. It was the first quadrennial conference following the historic agreement of the “triple promises” of 2015 on climate, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Financing for Development.

The current pandemic has undone progress and exposed the multiple fractures in the global economy, notably: a worrying disconnect between sizable national responses and inadequate international measures; unequal policy and fiscal space and access to vaccines and healthcare, as well as to social safety nets and other support; and the retreat of the state since the 80s, which has left governments unable to respond to public health crises.

The high-level political forum at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2019 had already highlighted that the world was dangerously off track in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres had declared that a “decade of action” was needed to make up for lost ground in achieving the Goals.

The pandemic risks making the results underpinning progress on the Sustainable Development Goals become even more uneven, and the pace of these achievements risks falling even further behind expectations. Developing countries face a huge financing gap for the critical areas of green investment, poverty reduction, access to nutrition and provision of healthcare. Least Developed Countries face an even larger financing gap. Bridging the digital divide and strengthening the blue economy require long-term investment in many developing countries.

The global response needs to match the scale of the challenge, and steer recovery towards the triple promises of 2015. A major focus of UNCTAD15 will be getting the Sustainable Development Goals back on track. The conference is an opportunity to sound the alarm on the lack of progress towards achieving the SDGs and, critically, the lack of progress in mobilizing sustainable finance to achieve the Goals.

In the 2016 Nairobi Maafikiano, member States reiterated their will to strengthen the role of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), in implementation of financing for development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as the focal point within the United Nations system for the integrated treatment of trade and development

and interrelated issues in the areas of finance, technology, investment and sustainable development.

UNCTAD's work on key areas of Financing for Development has supported developing countries in understanding and responding to challenges including tackling illicit financial flows, implementation of debt restructuring mechanisms that are fair to borrowers and lenders, increasing availability of bilateral and multilateral financing; negotiation and reform of multilateral agreements in the areas of health and climate-related investments; and sustainable financing for SMEs that account for 70% of global employment and 50% of GDP.

This event is an opportunity for representatives of civil society and UNCTAD experts to discuss strategic priorities in Financing for Development and the upcoming conference can contribute to mobilizing financing for developing countries.