



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Dialogue with Permanent Delegations to UNESCO on the future Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029 (41 C/4)

- Pillar 3 of UNESCO's Strategic Transformation -

July 2019

General Note

I. Background and objectives

As part of the preparatory process for the upcoming UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy, and pursuant to 206 EX/Decision 5.II.F of the Executive Board,¹ the Secretariat is organizing a series of meetings with the Permanent Delegations to UNESCO from 12 to 24 July 2019 (Reference: letter of invitation CAB-Strategic-2019-005736 dated 6 June 2019).

These meetings for discussion and open dialogue between the Permanent Delegations and the Assistant Directors-General of programme sectors are part of Pillar 3 of the strategic transformation, which proposes an "inclusive, transparent and participative reflection on the programmes with the aim of increasing UNESCO's relevance and effectiveness".

They will enable reflection on the major trends, opportunities and challenges that may have an impact on the Organization's programmes in each of its fields of competence.

The meetings will not adopt decisions or recommendations. However, the views and ideas expressed by delegates will inform the discussions planned as part of the work of the 40th session of the General Conference. Member States will therefore have the opportunity to continue the dialogue, and deliberate on the overall strategic direction in order to adopt a road map for the preparation of the next Medium-Term Strategy (41 C/4) and the next Programme and Budget (41 C/5).

II. Global environment – trends and challenges

The commitments of the international community and Member States to the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the goals of Agenda 2063 of the African Union, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the Paris Agreement already constitute the overall context of the next Medium-Term Strategy, covering the period 2022-2029.

UNESCO's world reports, such as the Global Education Monitoring Report, the UNESCO Science Report, the World Water Development Report, the Global Ocean Science Report, among others, as well as a number of global studies and reports have analyzed current trends, assessed progress towards the SDGs and other internationally agreed development goals and outlined future trends, challenges and opportunities that need to be taken into consideration.

Demographic changes, urbanization, climate change, conflicts and protracted crises, and frontier technologies are recognized already as significant megatrends to have in the future a major impact on the realization of the SDGs, as stated by the UN Secretary General in his report to the 2019 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on "[Long-term impact of current trends in the economic, social and environmental areas on the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals](#)".

¹ According to paragraph 5 of that decision, the Executive Board "[...] encourages the Director-General to ensure that future discussions on Pillar 3 take a transparent, dialogue-based approach, which includes continuous and regular communication between the Assistant Directors-General and Member States as well as structured intergovernmental consultations";

➤ **No country is on track to meeting all the 17 SDGs**

With regard to the 2030 Agenda for sustainable Development and its Goals, recent trends observed along several dimensions with cross-cutting impacts across the entire 2030 Agenda do not even in the right direction. These include **rising inequalities, global warming and biodiversity loss**.

More specifically, according to recent assessments, most of the 169 SDG targets are unlikely to be achieved at current rates of progress, with some exceptions. Over the past four years, many governments and stakeholders have taken necessary action to respond to the 2030 Agenda, and progress has been made on a number of SDGs and targets. However, progress has been slow on many Goals and the most vulnerable people and countries continue to suffer the most:²

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere: The decline of global extreme poverty continues, but has slowed. The deceleration indicates that the world is not on track to achieve the target of less than 3% of the world living in extreme poverty by 2030. People who continue to live in extreme poverty face deep entrenched deprivation often exacerbated by violent conflicts and vulnerability to disasters.

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all: Despite the considerable progress on education, access and participation over the past years, 262 million children and youth of age 6 to 17 were still out of school in 2017, and more than half of children and adolescents are not meeting minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics. While rapid technological changes present opportunities and challenges, the learning environment, capacity of teachers and the quality of education have not kept pace. . If we do not achieve the education goal, the other global goals will not be achieved either.

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls: While some indicators of gender equality are progressing, insufficient progress on structural issues at the root of gender inequality, such as legal discrimination, unfair social norms and attitudes, decision making on sexual and reproductive issues and low levels of political participation, are undermining our ability to achieve SDG 5.

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all: Despite progress, billions of people still lack safe water, sanitation and handwashing facilities. As of today, most countries are unlikely to reach full implementation of integrated water resources management by 2030. Growing demand for water, threats to water security, and increasing frequency and severity of droughts and floods resulting from climate change.

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation: Countries that are lagging behind, such as LDCs, face serious challenges in doubling manufacturing industry's share of GDP by 2030 and investment in scientific research and innovation remain below the global average.

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries: Inequalities within and among nations continue to be a significant concern despite progress and efforts in narrowing

² Summary provided for selected SDGs that are most relevant to UNESCO's work. Extracted and adapted from the [Report of the UN Secretary-General on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#).

disparities of opportunity, income and power. Income inequality continues to rise in many parts of the world, even if the bottom 40% of the population in many countries have experienced positive growth rates.

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable:

Substantial progress has been made in reducing the proportion of global urban population living in slums, though more than 1 billion people continue to live in such situations. The vast majority of urban residents breathe poor quality air and have limited access to transport and open public spaces. With the areas occupied by cities growing faster than their populations, there are profound repercussions for sustainability.

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts: With rising greenhouse gas emissions, climate change is occurring at rates much faster than anticipated and its effects are clearly felt world-wide. Access to finance and strengthened capacities need to be scaled up at a much faster rate, particularly for LDCs and SIDS.

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development: The expansion of protected areas for marine biodiversity and existing policies and treaties that encourage responsible use of ocean resources are still insufficient to combat the adverse effects of overfishing, growing ocean acidification due to climate change and worsening coastal eutrophication.

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss: Global trends in protecting terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity are encouraging: Forest loss is slowing down, more key biodiversity areas are protected, and more financial assistance is flowing towards biodiversity protection. Yet, the 2020 targets in Goal 15 are unlikely to be met, land degradation continues, biodiversity loss is occurring at an alarming rate, and invasive species and illicit poaching and trafficking of wildlife continue to thwart efforts to protect and restore vital ecosystems and species.

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels:

Advances in ending violence, promoting the rule of law, strengthening institutions, and increasing access to justice is uneven and continues to deprive millions of security, rights and opportunities and undermine the delivery of public services and broader economic development. Attacks on civil society are also holding back development progress. Renewed efforts are essential to move towards achievement of SDG 16.

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development:

Progress on some means of implementation targets is moving rapidly: personal remittances are at an all-time high; an increasing proportion of the global population has access to the Internet; the LDC Technology Bank has been established. Yet, significant challenges remain: ODA is declining, private investment flows are not well aligned with sustainable development. In addition, in its report "[2019 Financing for Sustainable Development Report](#)", the Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development warns that mobilizing sufficient financing remains a major challenge in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite signs of progress, investments that are critical to achieving the SDGs remain underfunded and parts of the multilateral system are under strain.

III. Transforming challenges into opportunities

The above is only a brief, incomplete snapshot of existing recent assessments that will inform the debates and decisions of Member States and stakeholders when they will review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the upcoming meetings of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), on 9-18 July under the auspices of ECOSOC on the theme "*Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality*", and later, on 24-25 September, under the auspices of the 74th session of the General Assembly at the SDG summit, which will be the first United Nations summit on the SDGs since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in September 2015.

This analysis will be pursued further, particularly with regard to country and regional level issues and challenges, and to take into account the complexity of the challenges and opportunities ahead, and their interrelated, interlinked nature and impact on the realization of the SDGs.

Taking necessary collective action has therefore become urgent, not only to address bottlenecks and 'accelerate' current trends, but to also anticipate and prepare the response for future challenges and opportunities that would impact sustainable development.

The reports, as well as draft declarations and political statements call for "**a more ambitious and accelerated response to reach out our common vision by 2030**".

During this series of **meetings and dialogue between the Permanent Delegations and each of the programme sector ADGs**, delegates will have the opportunity to initiate reflection on key current and future trends, and to analyse their implications, at both the regional and national levels. This reflection is an important step in the definition of the overall strategic direction of UNESCO's work by 2030.

In addition to this general note, the sectors have prepared introductory notes³ that could serve as a general framework for the discussions, and enable participants to express and exchange their views between themselves and the ADGs. The indicative questions contained in the letter of invitation are recalled below:

1. In your view, what are/will be the key global trends, opportunities and challenges of relevance to UNESCO's mandate over the next ten years?
2. How can we better reposition UNESCO in the 2030 Agenda?
3. Where can you see opportunities for a transversal and interdisciplinary approach by UNESCO?
4. How can Global Priority Africa be better reflected in UNESCO's programme and organizational culture?
5. How can we better contribute to the strengthening and institutionalization of the promotion of gender equality through UNESCO's programmes?