**Time for effective climate action**

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World leaders prepare to meet in September this year to review the progress countries have made so far towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the midpoint for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs.

To set the agenda for the September moot, the 2023 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is running from July 10 to July 19 at the UN Headquarters in New York. The HLPF is a central platform of the UN for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.

The forum has been convened in collaboration with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on the theme of climate and SDG synergy discussions. The First Global Climate and SDG Synergy Conference was held in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 2019.

According to the recently released Sustainable Development Report 2023, at the midpoint for achieving the 2030 Agenda, all SDGs are seriously off track. Although the world made some progress on the SDGs from 2015 to 2019, this was already vastly insufficient to achieve the goals. Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 followed by a polycrisis – the Russia-Ukraine war, Pakistan floods, etc — the SDG progress has stalled globally.

World leaders have so far failed to understand that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement are intrinsically linked, and one cannot be achieved without the other. Vulnerable nations, such as least-developed countries (LDCs) in South Asia, Africa and small-island developing states (SIDS) are in jeopardy due to the ongoing fiscal crisis and soaring debt levels exacerbated by disproportionate risks from climate-related disasters. Efforts made to improve climate resilience are also failing to have any impact.

As such, taking forward both global agendas in harmony has the potential of achieving the targets contained in both programmes in an effective and efficient way, while ensuring a just and equitable future at the same time. Taking climate and SDG development action in an integrated way is not an imaginary concept, but a practical guideline for all forms and levels of decision-making.

In this respect, the global forum provides a core platform for policy dialogue on harnessing climate and SDG synergies. This is not only meant to highlight the significance of finding options for multi-sectoral, integrated, policy interventions by enhancing synergy between climate change and nexus approaches. It also lays out a unique opportunity to take stock of practical measures that are being implemented by developing countries to advance climate and SDG synergies through SDG country goals and nationally determined contributions (NDCs).

The nexus approach essentially subscribes to an integrated planning, coherent policies and economic stimulus investments designed to meet both SDGs and climate challenges that can generate significant co-benefits and speed up progress on climate-resilient sustainable development. By adopting the concerted global public and private collaborative efforts, achievement of all SDGs can be made possible, trade-offs avoided, and social disparities reduced.

Most urgently, UN member states should adopt an SDG stimulus to close the massive financing gap faced by many developing economies. Increased funding from the multilateral development banks (MDBs) and public development banks (PDBs) to low- and middle-income countries is another important step, linked to investments in the SDGs;

To further strengthen the evidence base for synergistic action and to maximize impact, a set of empirical evidence on climate action and the SDGs is one most critical task for developing and under-developed nations. Improving the science-based validation mechanism of implementation by the member states is much needed. Generating evidence on the co-relation alongside continuous stock-takes including how various stakeholders are progressing in delivering jointly on these two agendas.

The exercise will explore relevant targets for each SDG, including climate change impacts, and analyze how the goals are interconnected. It can also provide a forward-looking summary, with a set of key recommendations for enhancing synergistic implementation at the political and practical levels.

Pakistan was the first country to adopt the SDGs 2030 agenda through a unanimous resolution of parliament followed by the establishment of a dedicated SDGs section at the federal level in the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives (MoP&SI) to monitor and coordinate as a national coordinating entity to achieve Pakistan’s sustainable development. Likewise, parliament adopted a proactive approach towards the development agenda by setting up a parliamentary taskforce to oversee the implementation of the SDGs. The taskforce has realized its true mandate for quite some time and has started playing a vibrant role by taking SDG considerations at the highest policy forum. The current convener’s participation has been remarkable at the global forum. The convener suggested a consortium of Asian nations to set up a regional disaster management platform for cooperation for resilience and collective response.

Since the parliamentary taskforce on SDGs is the country’s highest level policy platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it needs to take into account the Paris Climate goals and SDG synergies.

In this regard, a high-level country-level forum is recommended to be held annually. This will serve as an opportunity for stakeholders to assess progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda and commitment made under the Paris Agreement in its entirety including the interlinks between the SDGs and the Paris Agreement goals.

Similarly, there is a critical need for the Ministry Of Development And Special Initiatives, which is responsible for SDGs implementation through sectoral integration, to supervise the progress made on synergetic action at all levels and devise a well-defined mechanism of climate and SDGs synergic implementation across provincial and federal subjects.

This is yet another rare window of opportunity for world leaders to bolster political momentum to further revitalize the UN development system for an integrated delivery to address roadblocks like climate change, health and economy crisis.

The world needs an ‘all-hands-on-deck’ effort at this point in time to address global challenges — whether they are related to climate change, conflict or pandemics. It is also clear that the UN can play a vital role in forging meaningful collaborations. Achieving the SDGs depends on robust and effective multilateralism, but this means rallying political will and commitment.

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