

# ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE CONTINUOUS PRESENCE OF THE RAMPAGING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA.

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## Abstract

On February 27<sup>th</sup> 2020, Nigeria became the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to announce the discovery of COVID-19 cases. Ever since then, the pandemic has become a global phenomenon that started spreading from country to country as an invisible enemy. It affects all aspects of human life, from religious, social, cultural, sporting, career and educational activities. The rampaging effect and the continuous presence of the pandemic have put lots of question marks on the realization of the 2030 agenda of Sustainable development goals (SDGs). In this research, all the listed seventeen (17) goals were critically evaluated based on their framework using the reality concept within the context of the ravaging pandemic in the country. It was observed that the pandemic has jeopardized the production of data central to the achievement of SDGs, thus creating serious data gaps in assessing country-level programs towards the SDGs. While only four (4) out of the seventeen (17) listed goals appeared feasible for Nigeria, others remained largely elusive. A careful analysis shows that several of the 169 targets set by SDGs for achievement in the year 2020 remains unachieved at moment, hence anticipating an ambitious-like posture for the 2030 agenda.

Keywords: Agenda 2030, COVID-19, Data, Pandemic, Sustainable development goals.

## 1.0 Introduction

The Sustainable development goals (SDGs) agenda as an offshoot of the Millennium development goals (MDGs) scheme becomes imperative in the ever-increasing challenges of the dynamic world. While the MDGs focused mainly on the amelioration of poverty and hunger in the less developed countries of the world, SDGs goals are of wider scope in their terms, which extend to social and economic aspects of human society and to a spatial extent, their interactions with the ecosystem by putting sustainability as a focus. SDGs is targeted towards achieving the world transformation agenda on or before year 2030. The seventeen (17) Sustainable development goals proposed for achievement demand nothing short of the guarantee of human rights for all and sundry achievable through a transformation of the economic and political systems that govern our present-day ever dynamics societies. Recent reports of The Sustainable Development Goals (2020) quoted the United Nations, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as stated that “Everything we do during and after this crisis [COVID-19] must be with a strong focus on building more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change, and the many other global challenges we face.” Many kinds of research have shown that COVID-19 has

disrupted millions of people's ways of life and sources of income, especially the informal sector business operators and family households' income globally, and several efforts being put in place by national governments of different countries have not yielded the expected results (Adeboye et al.,2022). According to Arora and Mishra (2019), several of the 169 targets set by SDGs for achievement in the year 2020 remains unachieved as at moment, hence anticipating an ambitious-like posture for the 2030 agenda. The year 2021 ordinarily should had mark the vigorous commencement of the decade of action to deliver the SDGs by 2030, but the ever-changing ecosystems compounded by the ravaging COVID-19 pandemic have been largely attributed to the uncertainty which prevails its realization at the targeted date. To further compound the existing quagmire, the recently discovered Delta variant is deadlier and very obviously going around; reports have confirmed that younger people are equally seriously being affected. So youthfulness is no longer a guarantee of safety.

## **2.0 An Overview of the Sustainable Development Goals**

Goals 1, 2, 8, 9 and 12 which border respectively on “No poverty, zero hunger, decent work and economic growth, industry innovation and infrastructure, responsible consumption and production” are directly related to the economic stability around the globes. The realization of these goals have become more of mirage with the continuous presence of Covid-19. The SDGs (2020) reported that over 71 million are already pushed into poverty and approximately 25.9% of the world population are affected by severe food insecurity. Small scale producers comprising between 40% - 85% of all food producers in the developing countries are the worst hit by the pandemic, thus created additional threat to food systems. According to Barron (2020), capital markets declined beyond 30% as at March 2020 which implied volatilities of equities have spiked to crisis levels and credit spreads on non-investment grade debt have widened sharply as investors attempt to reduce risks due to the pandemic effect. The interim economic outlook highlighted by OECD (2020) emphasized that Covid-19 had already worsened China economic growth, and subsequent outbreaks in other continents were eroding prospects for economic growth. Hitherto, governments of countries have introduced unprecedented measures to contain the epidemic. While it is of necessity to contain the virus, it is of note that measures involved have led to both socio and economic quagmire in the countries mostly affected. Thus, the shutdowns could lead to high declination in the level of economic development, thereby causing most consumers' expenditure to be adversely affected. The magnitude of these occurrences would far outweigh the economic recession experienced during the global financial meltdown if the situations persist for too long. Though, the shutdown is gradually being eased out, the ease of doing businesses around the globe still remain pervasive due to the continuous presence of Covid-19. Though, recent statistics of businesses spikes in some developed economy shows some level of

improvement, but the reverse is the case in Africa, most especially Nigeria, where development indices have experienced continuous negative trend with inflationary rate currently at double digits.

On the other hand, goals 3, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 are directly related to the sustainability of the ecosystems. The realization of these goals are mainly linked to the natural environment that is lagging far behind and seems impossible to achieve due to the ravaging pandemic which is not only limited to Covid-19, but with other deadly diseases such as cholera, Ebola, Bird Flu, Monkey pox etc. hovering around the globe. The listed goals are targeted towards achieving good health, clean water, clean affordable energy, sustainable communities, good climatic condition, quality aquatic culture and quality terrestrial life. A habitable environment is germane to quality existence of life; however, this has been greatly threatened by the proliferation of the ozone layer which makes loom a global climatic change. It has been reported that the pandemic has interrupted childhood immunization in about 70 countries around the globe; illness and deaths from communicable diseases will spike in Sub-Saharan Africa and with services cancellation due to the ravaging pandemic, a 100% increase in malaria deaths is expected. According to WHO (2021), 26 Africans die of COVID every hour and the availability of vaccines is seriously in doubt. These aforementioned alone have put a big question mark on goal 3, thus putting its reality in doubt. Ensuring the availability and sustainable management of sanitary water for all is a fundamental human right, but it is disinteresting to note that the majority, especially from developing nations have been denied the right to hygienic water. In fact, I can state without fear or favor that Nigerians have been eluded the right to government-sponsored pipe born water for more than a decade ago. United Nations World Water Development Report (2022) emphasized that the current status of water resources across the globe illuminated the need to incorporate effective water resources management into decision-making, which is fundamental to achieving sustainable water and the SDGs of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

The remaining goals 4 and 5 which border respectively on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education as well as achievement of gender equality are directly related to the population of young boys and girls within the ecosystem. The advent of COVID-19 brought to almost a dead end, the discharge of quality education around the globe saves for virtual learning which only runs effectively in developed countries of the world. Though it was not without its antecedent benefits, as it brought into limelight the knowledge of usage for many virtual platforms such as zoom, google meets, Microsoft meets, google classroom etc. among the citizenry of developing countries. Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls are difficult to achieve in some continents of the world due to different in religious and cultural believes.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development comprises 17 sustainable development goals (SDG) that integrate the different dimensions of development, such as the economic, social, and environmental. The 2030 Agenda focuses on the most vulnerable subgroups of the population. This is why the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) mandate claims to disaggregate SDG indicators by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location, or other characteristics, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (United Nations, 2019a). According to United Nations (2019b), almost one-third of the global SDG indicators can be derived from household surveys. It is pertinent to note that direct contact-household surveys have been seriously hindered since the breakout of the pandemic, and thus limiting the chances of quality surveys.

**3.0 Thematic and Empirical Analysis of Sustainable Development Goals**

**Goal 1-** Prior to the advent of Covid-19, progress toward achieving poverty reduction has decelerated. According to the SDG reports, the global population living in abject poverty declined from 15.7% to 10.0% between 2010 and 2015, and further declined to 8.2% in the year 2019. The poverty level was projected to rise to 8.8% in the year 2020 with an estimated 71 million additional people that will be living in extreme poverty due to COVID-19. This development has halted decades of progress experienced in poverty reduction and according to the SDGs (2021) reports, the global extreme poverty rate rose for the first time in over 2 decades due to the breakout of the Covid-19 pandemic. The last time the world experienced such was during the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s. Even before COVID-19 Hundreds of millions of people were pushed back into extreme poverty and chronic hunger, and it was projected that 6% of the global population would still be living in extreme poverty in 2030, missing the target of ending poverty. The figure below depicts the trend of poverty over years.

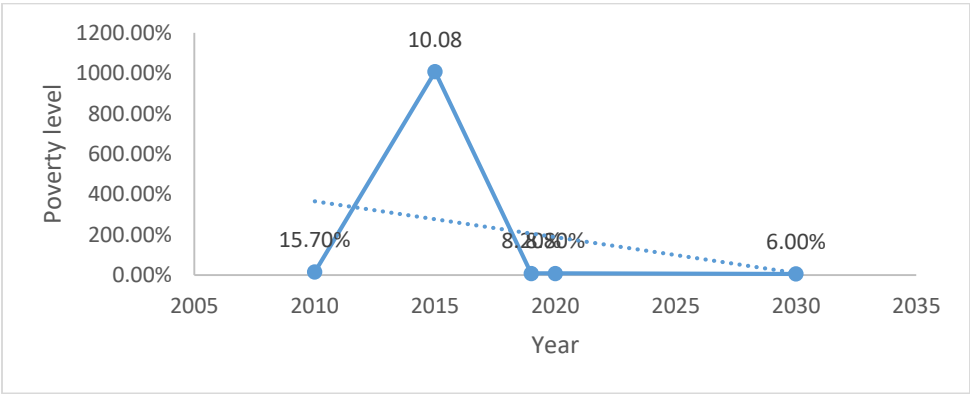


Fig 1: Projected Poverty Tend

Though the trend is downward as expected, however, the projection of 6% poverty level by 2030 contradicts the expectation of zero percent. In Nigeria as of today, majority are being pushed down the poverty lane due to the failure of government to create jobs nor creating an enabling environment for jobs provision by

both local and external investors. More so, the recent cash swap policy of the Central Bank of Nigeria in this year, 2023 has further worsened the economic situation thereby deep citizens further into poverty lane.

**Goal 2-** Eradicating hunger and achieving food security remains a challenge, more so in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. At the global level, hunger and food insecurity have been on the rise, and malnutrition still affects millions of children. According to SDGs (2021) reports, 720-811 million of world citizens have been estimated to be undernourished as a result of the pandemic in 2020 while an additional 70-161 million people are likely to have experienced hunger. With the continuous presence of Covid-19, these estimates are not likely to be anything different from the present reality. The figure below depicts the percentage of children and adult suffering from different kind of malnutrition as at 2021. In Nigeria, during COVID-19, food palliatives were shared among the supposed to be indigent members of the societies, this effort however ended to be a waste due to lack of quality data. The few pertinent questions which made the success a mirage are: who are the real indigent citizens? Where are there residential address? What is there source and level of incomes prior to the advent of Covid-19? Has recent household census survey been conducted to know the needs of each indigent family? Has there being an established reliable chain of distribution for such largesse in the past? The practice of palliatives works effectively in the developed nations because most of these teething problems are not of concerns.

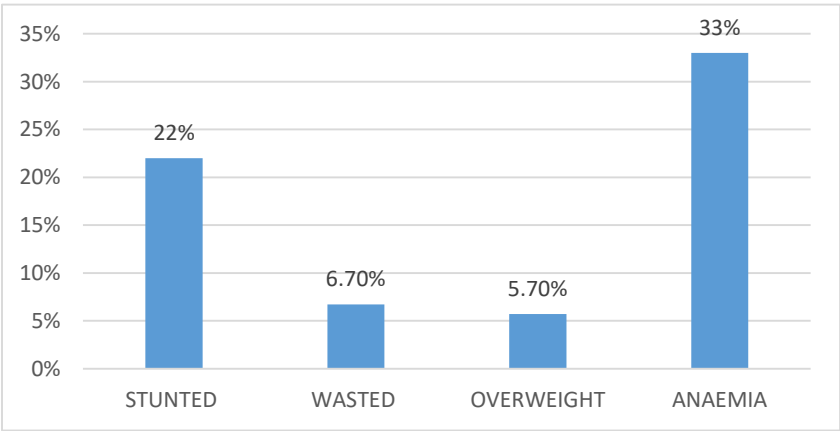


Figure 2: Global Worsening Malnutrition Cases

**Goal 3-** The global intention to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages remains a mirage most especially in developing continent of Africa. Though Nigeria is an acclaimed giant of Africa, but not an exception. The advent of COVID-19 has only made the matter a worst scenario. COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted one or more essential health services and poses major health threats beyond the disease itself. It has wreaked havoc worldwide on children’s learning and well-being, and women have suffered a disproportionate share of job losses and increased care work at home. Roy and Kar (2020)

conducted a resource allocation suggesting that the building of more healthcare centers will cost more and that the use of Social Variability Index (SVI) will be better for resource allocation during COVID-19.

As of June 2021, total reported deaths from COVID-19 reached 3.7 million globally. Europe and Northern America experienced the largest loss at close to 1.7 million, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean at about 1.2 million, and Central and Southern Asia at slightly under half a million. That of Nigeria alone as of October 31, 2021, rose to 2,894 out of 211,961 infected people (NCDC, 2021). Childhood immunization was interrupted in over 70 countries due to the pandemic, the effect of which unnecessarily exposed many children to other diseases apart from Covid-19.

Hitherto, the invention of Covid-19 vaccines remained in short supply in the continent of Africa, most especially in Nigeria due to poverty level of the country and illiteracy rates of the citizenry.

**Goal 4-** COVID-19 has weakened the resolve to achieve education for all children by the year 2030. Before the pandemic, progress in education was already too slow to achieve goal to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Almost three years into the pandemic crisis, many students were still affected by full or partial school closures. The children of the poor are bearing the brunt of the crisis more. When the lockdown became eased, many of such children never return to school; some are forced into child marriage or child labour. According to SDGs (2011) reports, only 59 per cent of grade three children in 2019 were proficient in reading while the pandemic is projected to cause an additional 101 million children to fall below the minimum reading proficiency threshold, increasing the total number of students falling behind to 584 million in 2020. This wipes out the progress achieved in education over the past 20 years. Hitherto, there are some Nigerian Universities that are still struggling to meet up with the admitted students of the 2020/2021 session in this year 2023 due to the advent of COVID-19 coupled with the incessant industrial strike by the academic staff unions. Thus, special efforts are required to recover learning losses caused by COVID-19, as its occurrence has wiped out the progress achieved over the past 20 years in the education sector.

**Goal 5-** The negative impacts of Covid-19 on the socio-economic aspect of life have adversely affected the progress of achieving gender inequality. Violence against women and young girls has intensified during the lock-up, due to the worsening economic situation experienced as a result of the pandemic. The pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities and threatens to undermine progress on women's empowerment. There were reports of many women being abused especially in the major cities of Nigeria by frustrated hubbies. Most couples were like strange bedfellows during the pandemic as many have never experienced such locked-up in the times past.

**Goal 6-** This goal targets the availability and sustainable management of sanitary water for all. Prior to Covid-19, billions still lack water and sanitation services while two in five healthcare facilities globally have no hand sanitizer with an estimated three (3) billion people worldwide lacking basic handwashing facilities domestically. According to SDG (2021) reports, water scarcity could displace an estimated 700 million people by 2030. With the continuous presence of the pandemic, maintaining a sanitary environment looks almost impossible. The government of Nigeria has failed completely in the provision of drinkable water for its citizenry. Every house owner in Nigeria now makes provision for water based on their financial capacities. The major sources of water in Nigeria are borehole and well digging, and water realized therein are largely consumed untreated. Even, though the highly discussed national water resources bill recently proposed by the government has been widely criticized for not being designed to alleviate the suffering of the citizenry in terms of water provision, it will rather worsen the economic quagmire of the people. It was regarded as an obnoxious water resources bill, which was designed to rob Peter to pay Paul (The Guardian, 2022).

**Goal 7-** Poverty has been linked as a major factor responsible for the lack of affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all in Sub-Saharan Africa. A Steady power supply requires humongous capital investments that has become almost unaffordable for developing countries of Africa. Even when this fund is sourced, corrupt government officials would not have allowed it to be properly channeled. The advent of COVID-19 has made the matter worse, and it has reversed greatly the little gains that might have been made on the provision of a steady power supply. The number of people without electricity supply in Africa has increased in the year 2020 after declining over the previous six years. Basic electricity services are now unaffordable for more than 25 million people who had previously gained access, due to population growth and increasing levels of poverty (SDG Reports, 2021). Now that the pandemic is gradually easing out, stable electricity can still not be guaranteed in every parts of Nigeria. Though the populace is fast embracing the use of renewable energy in the area of Solar power. However, it is capital intensive and its effectiveness will take several years to be experienced as a result of poverty.

**Goal 8-** This goal is about promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Prior to the advent of COVID-19, statistics have revealed a snail growth of global economic. The pandemic only worsened the situation and the continent that is mostly affected is the Sub-Saharan Africa. The burden and socioeconomic impact of the disease is really evident in developing countries of which Nigeria is no exception. It was further discussed that the Virus has affected all aspects of the economy including the poverty rate, unemployment rate, older people, and people with disabilities; more so, if not fully contained it will affect the incidence rate of COVID-19 negatively (Verity *et al.*, 2020). As predicted by the United Nation, the road to economic recovery may be a long bumpy ride for many countries. While other developed countries of the world may recover in no

time, current fiscal statistics in Nigeria have shown that the country is not likely to recover soon from the economic downturn.

**Goal 9-** This is about building resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation. In the advent of the pandemic, the movement of people and goods both within and outside countries were restricted, disrupting global value chains, as well as global manufacturing and transport industries. Small-scale industries in particular have been severely affected as a result of the locked down imposed on everyone by the government. The lack of resilient infrastructure, information and communication technologies, and basic services limits a country's ability to perform and adjust to shocks. For Nigeria to achieve Goal 9, industrialization, improvements in infrastructure, and the promotion of technological innovation by increasing investment in research and development are key. However, achieving the aforementioned currently looks like mirage. Apart from the post pandemic effects, the level of insecurity couple with unfavorable government monetary, fiscal and political policies currently pervading the nation has further compounded the achievement of this goal. The development and production of vaccines against COVID-19 in record time is one example of the power of technological innovation, which has given the world cause for hope, but Nigeria has not been able to produce a single dose of vaccine apart from relying on importation.

**Goal 10-** This is concerned about reducing the gaps of inequality within and among countries. Nigeria compared with other countries of the world, most especially the developed ones has been worst in terms of poor exchange rates, dilapidated infrastructure, bad governance, poor standard of living with majority living below per capital income of 100 USD a day, lack of social amenities just to mention few. Essential needs of life have become a luxury in Nigeria, of which only the riches can afford. Inequality within the country is obvious with the gaps between the elites and the masses keeps widening on daily basis. Nigeria system has long eroded the middle men in terms of wealth even before the pandemic. It is either you are rich or you are poor! Thus achieving goal 10 on or before the year 2030 looks almost impossible.

**Goal 11-** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable is the aim of goal 11. Commercial city of Lagos has become the epicenter of COVID-19 in Nigeria, exposing its vulnerabilities stemming from lack of adequate and affordable housing, insufficient public health systems, and inadequate urban infrastructure such as water, sanitation and waste services, public transport and open public spaces. Deeply rooted inequalities have led to disproportionate pandemic-related impacts on migrants, the homeless, and those living in urban slums like Ajegunle town, and informal settlements like Makoko in Yaba metropolis. In responding to the crisis, Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and the government of Lagos state put in place many make shift isolation and medical centers for quick health recovery, and other policies were also put in place as engines of economic recovery, innovation and catalysts for social and economic transformation. Recovery from the pandemic offers the opportunity to



rethink and reimagine urban areas as hubs of sustainable and inclusive growth. It is of opinion that if all these efforts could be sustaining in the long run, achieving goal 11 would become a reality.

**Goal 12-** This goal is about ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns within the country. A growing global population combined with the unsustainable use of natural resources is having a devastating impact on our planet – propelling climate change, destroying nature and raising pollution levels (SDGs Reports, 2021). The rapidly growing rate of natural resource consumption in Nigeria is quite alarming. Productive activities have been completely relegated to the background by successive governments, who prefer to administer an import driven economy. The country is blessed with many natural resources ranging from oil, minerals, agricultural products which are largely been consumed without any productive activities, thereby technically killing the real sector of the economy. Progress to eliminate petroleum products subsidies remains uneven, and almost becoming a suicidal mission for successive government because of the untold hardship the policy will inflict on citizenry due to the government insincerity of purpose. If this trend of activities continues in Nigeria, achieving the Paris agreement and 2030 agenda will continue to be threatened.

**Goal 13-** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts is the aim of this goal. According to the SDGs reports (2021), the climate crisis continues largely unabated despite a pandemic-related economic slowdown. A temporary reduction in human activities resulted in a dip in emissions. However, concentrations of greenhouse gases continued to increase in 2020, reaching new record highs. Notwithstanding a global pandemic, countries are advancing climate action, with a focus on adaptation and Nigeria is no exception. Though government effort in this direction has not been manifested.

**Goal 14-** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. The sustainability of our oceans demands renewed efforts to safeguard key biodiversity areas. In Nigeria, majority of the riverine dwellers rely on sea products as means of livelihood. The seas and oceans in their ecosystem provide them food for sustenance, economic advantage, medium of transportation and source of irrigation farming while many are suffering the consequences of dwelling in the riverine area. The Niger Delta community readily comes into mind when it comes to suffering the consequences of living in the riverine area as a result of oil spillage and gas flaring. Government effort is required in this direction as this has been considered as a major stumbling block to the achievement of goal 14.

**Goal 15.-** This goal is about protection, restoration and promotion of sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. The green revolution policy of Nigeria which translates to the slogan of “plant a tree a day” could suffice for the actualization of this goal if and only if it is sustained in the long run.

**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 is the aim of this goal. Peaceful

and inclusive societies have become a mirage in Nigeria with daily reports of Boko Haram invasion, kidnapping, insurgency, Niger Delta militants, intra communal clash etc. Thus sustainable development may remain unachievable unless urgent political intervention is provided to curb all these menace.

**Goal 17-** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development. The continuous presence of COVID-19 is further testing multilateral and global partnerships that were already in jeopardy. Though foreign aid reached an all-time high during the crisis, but donors are still not living up to their commitments having equally experienced an economic downturn due to the pandemic. Findings from trend analysis of Foreign Direct investments (FDI) data show that FDI flows into Nigeria have been on a decline over the years before the Covid-19 pandemic reared its ugly head in Q1 2020 (Ogundipe et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the UNCTAD (2021) World Investment Report, emphasized that Nigeria's inflow of FDI increased by 3.5% from 2019-2020 despite the global economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and the FDI flows rebounded strongly in 2021.

In the world bank's 2020 edition of the doing Business Report, Nigeria ranked 131st worldwide, for ease of doing business due to its partial privatization, advantageous taxation system, significant natural resources and low cost of labour. As the market expands, the government continually issues policies aimed at governing foreign investment to create a conducive business environment. Thus achieving goal 17 in the year 2030 is feasible for Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to its very core around the globe, Nigeria not an exception. Of all the seventeen (17) goals, only goals 11, 13, 15 and 17 appeared feasible and achievable in Nigeria. However, we must hold firm in our convictions and not let the crisis derail our hopes and ambitions. The principles on which the SDGs were established are key to building back better in the post-COVID-19 recovery. The continued pursuit of these universal goals will keep governments focused on growth, but also on inclusion, equity and sustainability. Our collective response to the pandemic can serve as a "warm-up" for our preparedness in preventing an even larger crisis – that is, global climate change, whose effects are already becoming all too familiar. Governments and businesses should heed the lessons learned from this wake-up call to formulate the kinds of transitions needed to build a healthier, more resilient and more sustainable world. Central to such transitions are timely and disaggregated data and statistics, from which effective and equitable measures and policies can be shaped. It has been opined that investments in data and statistical innovations are needed to maintain adequate coverage of all population groups as well as to guarantee the internal consistency, comparability and overall quality of data produced to advance implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The reality of the

present global situation occasioned by the Russian-Ukraine war has further hung in the balance, the actualization of SDG goals of the 2030 agenda. The war has caused massive human suffering in a massive scale. According to the UN Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed, the war has produced the worst refugee crisis in Europe since the second world war with over 4 million refugees from Ukraine who have fled to neighboring countries and more than 6 million who are internally displaced, and the figures keep rising on daily basis. This is a warning signal for a potential hunger crisis that looms in the aftermath of the war.

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