

Challenges the Pandemic Poses to the Fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals: Actions Promoted by Mexico

Los desafíos de la pandemia para el cumplimiento de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sustentable: acciones impulsadas por México

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Abstract:

This article looks at some of the reflections the Global Compact/Spanish Network has made on the possible effects of COVID-19 on the SDGs, based on the UN report “Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19”, and concludes by listing the main actions and initiatives Mexico participates in with a view to strengthening global governance and international cooperation.



Resumen:

El artículo recoge algunas de las reflexiones que el Pacto Mundial/Red Española realizó sobre los posibles efectos de la covid-19 en los ODS, con base en el informe de la ONU “Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19”. Cierra enlistando las principales acciones e iniciativas en las cuales México participa con el propósito de fortalecer la gobernanza mundial y la cooperación internacional.



Key Words:

UN, SDGs, COVID-19, multilateralism, international cooperation.



Palabras clave:

ONU, ODS, covid-19, multilateralismo, cooperación internacional.

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The world order established in the wake of World War II by the San Francisco Conference of April-June, 1945, at which the United Nations (UN) was created, has faced numerous challenges. One of these has been to maintain peace and guarantee international security. With the passing of the years, it has come to be understood that this mandate is not limited to avoiding violent conflicts, but rests on promoting the wellbeing of the population at large. In this regard, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide the best, globally approved framework ever created in this important endeavor.

The promotion of the SDGs by the UN is in line with its principle of fostering international development cooperation for the prevention and solution of political, social, cultural and humanitarian problems, while respecting human rights and guaranteeing the principles of self-determination of nations and their equality in the eyes of the law.

The principles that govern the actions of the UN and the principles of Mexico's foreign policy fully coincide. This, however, is not an act of chance, but can be attributed to the central role Mexico played in drawing up the Charter of the United Nations. This also explains Mexico's influence on the multilateral scenario, both in the past and in the present, shored up by the contributions of several generations of Mexican diplomats over the years.

Within this same tradition lies our conviction that collective, coordinated international action is capable of finding solutions to the challenges of globalization that jeopardize the achievement of the SDGs, like the COVID-19

pandemic, which poses a threat to public health, social wellbeing and economic activity.

The COVID-19 pandemic will have serious repercussions for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The goal of this article is to analyze some of the more visible challenges that lie ahead and the actions Mexico is taking to address them.

The Pandemic and its Impact on the SDGs

As regards the pandemic, the UN has stated that its impacts:

Could be both positive, as is the case of climate change, or negative, with particular emphasis on the repercussions for community health and greater inequalities due to the global economic recession, which could threaten the implementation of national sustainable development programs and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.¹

Based on the UN report “Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19”,² the Global Compact/Spanish Network has conducted a very timely analysis of the possible effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SDGs. Some of these reflections include:

- *SDG 1 (End poverty)*. The COVID-19 pandemic has reduced family income, which could cause vulnerable sectors of society to fall below the poverty line, reason why we need to guarantee protection for these groups in particular.

¹ Global Compact. Spanish Network, “Los efectos de la covid-19 en los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible,” April 7, 2020, at <https://www.pactomundial.org/2020/04/los-efectos-de-la-covid-19-en-los-objetivos-de-desarrollo-sostenible> (date of reference: August 22, 2020).

² UN, “Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19”, March 2020, at <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SG-Report-Socio-Economic-Impact-of-Covid19.pdf> (date of reference: August 22, 2020).

- *SDG 2 (Zero hunger)*. Food production and distribution could be interrupted, reason why we need to guarantee food security and foster a more resilient agri-food sector.
- *SDG 3 (Health and wellbeing)*. The pandemic is having a devastating effect on health worldwide. This is a global crisis that can only be overcome with unity and solidarity.
- *SDG 4 (Quality education)*. The closure of schools has forced students to learn online, but information technologies are not accessible to the entire population and steps need to be taken to democratize these.
- *SDG 5 (Gender equality)*. Women's economic benefits are at risk, which will lead to increased gender violence. Likewise, women make up the majority of health and social welfare workers, meaning they are at greater risk of catching the virus.
- *SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation)*. Achieving this goal is going to be complicated by a scarcity of water and interruptions in supplies, limiting the application of the hand-washing strategy, which is one of the most cost-effective measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- *SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy)*. A scarcity of supplies and personnel is interrupting power supplies, with the subsequent negative impact on health services.
- *SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth)*. Some 25 million people could find themselves unemployed as a result of the pandemic.
- *SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities)*. People living in marginalized neighborhoods are at greater risk of exposure to COVID-19, due to the high density of the population and close proximity of living quarters in these areas.
- *SDG 13 (Climate action)*. The COVID-19 pandemic could weaken commitment to climate action, but it could also result in reduced production and a less mobile population, which would have a favorable impact on the environment.
- *SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions)*. Conflicts reduce the efficacy of actions to prevent and control COVID-19, reason why people living in conflict zones are at greater risk of being infected and dying from the virus.
- *SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals)*. The rapid spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus has revealed global risks, but the pandemic has also highlighted

the need for multilateral action to create global public goods, such as vaccines and safe, effective medicines to control the pandemic.³

Actions Taken by Mexico

To address the pandemic, Mexico has promoted several initiatives, a noteworthy one being resolution 74/274 on international cooperation to ensure equitable global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment, which was adopted by the UN, and the Joint Declaration of the Alliance for Multilateralism. Some of the initiatives Mexico participates in are discussed below.

G20

At the virtual conference of G20 Heads of State on March 26, 2020, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador requested that the UN regulate the sale of drugs and medical equipment during the COVID-19 pandemic to counteract supply shortages and stockpiling by wealthier countries.

Resolution 74/274

To establish the mandate that would substantiate President López Obrador's proposal, under the leadership of Juan Ramón de la Fuente, the Mexican Mission to the UN headquarters in New York developed and promoted resolution 74/274⁴ among UN member states. Co-sponsored on April 20, 2020 by 179 countries at the UN General Assembly, this broad endorsement by the international community for a Mexican proposal sets a precedent, while reinforcing the collective conviction

³ Global Compact/Spanish Network, *op. cit.*

⁴ UN General Assembly, "International Cooperation to Ensure Global Access to Medicines, Vaccines and Medical Equipment to Face COVID-19", A/RES/74/274, April 21, 2020.

that multilateralism is the most legitimate and most effective means of addressing global issues and promoting the wellbeing of peoples.

The mandate that resolution 74/274 confers upon the UN takes into consideration the threat the COVID-19 pandemic poses to human health, safety and wellbeing, and its rapid spread around the world, causing severe social and economic disruption in its wake, among other corollaries. Likewise, the document acknowledges the importance of international cooperation, solidarity and effective multilateralism to ensure all countries can implement the necessary protective measures, including access to health inputs and medicines to minimize the negative impacts of the pandemic.

Resolution 74/274 reasserts the essential role of the United Nations in coordinating a global response to control and contain the spread of COVID-19, supporting countries and acknowledging the leadership of the World Health Organization (WHO) in this area. Hence the importance of the call to UN Secretary-General António Guterres to spearhead coordination between the various agencies of the UN, including financial organizations, to guarantee fair, transparent, efficient, timely and, in the case of developing countries, priority access to preventive inputs, diagnostic material, medicines and vaccines to prevent COVID-19, when these become available.

This petition has been complemented by a request that member states implement local legislation to prevent and penalize speculation and the stockpiling of the health inputs and medicines required to control COVID-19.

The Alliance for Multilateralism

With a view to contributing to global governance, on December 19, 2019, the chancellors of Mexico and France, Marcelo Ebrard and Jean-Yves Le Drian, signed the “Franco-Mexican Declaration for an Effective Multilateralism,” whose referent is the Alliance for Multilateralism formed by France and Germany in June 2019. Co-sponsored by Mexico at the UN General Assembly held in New York in September 2019, the Alliance shares views on how to overcome the main global obstacles to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and defends an international order grounded on the right to peace and global prosperity.

In this regard, the Joint Declaration of the Alliance for Multilateralism to address the COVID-19 pandemic, approved by the chancellors of

24 countries, can be viewed as a call to multilateral action in support of the UN and WHO. On the one hand, it emphasizes total support for WHO in managing the response to the pandemic in its capacity as a UN agency specialized in global public health, and on the other, it underlines the need to bolster national health systems so they are able to handle future epidemiological crises, especially countries with limited capacities.

By the same token, it reaffirms the strategic importance of multilateralism—to which the UN is central—as the best possible response to the proliferation of common risks and challenges, while pointing to the predominance of unipolar interests, discourses of hate, racism, xenophobia and the use of force as global threats to civilization. To these we must add the risks climate change poses to human health, without forgetting the attacks the multilateral system has come under from detractors who would like to bring it to an end so they can impose their own agenda on the international arena over and above law and justice.

Conclusion

It did not take long for COVID-19—one of the most severe global public health crises in recent history, due to the rapid spread of this new virus and the health emergency it sparked off—to put the response of the United Nations to the test. As the responsible public health agency, WHO has come under criticism, but this condemnation is nothing but yet another attack on the multilateral system.

In the midst of the crisis, Mexico has responded with political savvy and diplomatic appropriateness via the aforementioned initiatives, which complement the goal of shoring up global governance and international cooperation. There can be no question that, in the era of globalization and in the absence of a global government, that task of creating and promoting the public goods required to contain the risks facing our global society falls to the United Nations. These threats range from the reemergence of acts of barbarism that undermine civilization to unprecedented pandemics. Clearly, the best strategy to deal with challenges such as these, both present and future, is to work toward achieving the SDGs, as these are the most effective framework we have been able to build as a global society.